

# **SHAKESPEARE'S MORAL VISION IN HIS PROBLEM PLAYS**

**A THESIS**  
Submitted to  
**THE UNIVERSITY OF ALLAHABAD**  
for the award of the degree of  
**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**  
**IN ENGLISH**

*Supervised by*  
**Dr. R.R. Dutt**  
Professor of English

*Submitted by*  
**Mrs Sabiha Azmi**



**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH  
AND  
MODERN EUROPEAN LANGUAGES  
UNIVERSITY OF ALLAHABAD  
ALLAHABAD  
1993**

Dated : 5<sup>th</sup> October, 1993

This is to certify that Mrs Sabiha Azmi has worked under my supervision on "Shakespeare's Moral Vision In His Problem Plays" for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English for more than twenty four months. It is further certified that the thesis embodies her own work.

  
(R.R.Dutt.)

Professor of English  
Department of English &  
Modern European Languages,  
University of Allahabad,  
Allahabad.

## C O N T E N T S

	Page
PREFACE	1 - 11
INTRODUCTION	1-5
CHAPPTER - I	THE PROBLEM PLAY
	6-16
CHAPTER - II	MEASURE FOR MEASURE
	17-65
CHAPTER - III	ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL
	66-115
CHAPTER - IV	TROILUS AND CRILSSIDA
	116-173
CHAPTER - V	CONCLUSION
	174-183
BIBLIOGRAPHY	1-vi
<u>CORRIGENDUM</u>	

P R E F A C E

The plays of Shakespeare have fascinated me ever since I started serious reading. Of all his plays, none of the plays left me as bedevilled as did Measure for Measure, All's Well that Ends Well and Troilus and Cressida. The craft applied in these plays, the rich intrigue and cynical almost satirical approach of the dramatist left me in a much uneasy frame of mind. With the serious intent of knowing more about these plays I ventured to make it the subject of my doctoral dissertation. Delving into the subject, I found that F.S.Boas had applied the term "Problem Play" to these plays, for lack of a more apt description.

A detailed study of the texts revealed to me that these plays revolve around certain moral issues problems which defy any solution.

This thesis attempts to discover, analyse and if possible focus upon the moral vision of the playwright (if he has any).

My approach throughout is critical and analytical.

I owe a great deal to my supervisor, Dr.R.R.Dutt whose able guidance and supervision has enabled me to

complete my research . I am deeply indebted to Dr.L.R. Sharma (Reader,Department of English and Modern European Languages), whose sincere suggestions have been fruitful for my thesis.

.

I thank the Principal of my college, Dr.(Mrs) R.Tariq and my other colleagues who have helped me in all possible ways.

.

I express my gratitude to the Library of the Allahabad University , The Central Library, Allahabad and the National Library, Calcutta, for extending me all necessary help regarding books and journals.

.

I shall be failing in my duty if I do not thank my mother, Mrs. Ohausia Begam and my husband, Mr. T.R. Azmi and other members of the family, whose encouragement and moral support has helped me to complete my research.

.

My sincere thanks are due to the typists who have worked with me shoulder to shoulder to give my thesis a formal shape.

\*\*\*\*\*  
\*  
\* INTRODUCTION \*  
\*  
\*\*\*\*\*

## INTRODUCTION

The so called "Problem Plays" of Shakespeare have attracted less attention than the tragedies, comedies and histories. In fact it is only in the present century that scholars have seriously studied the plays which are labelled "Problem" - for lack of a more apt description. Amongst the first to attempt a comprehensive definition and study of these plays was F.S. Boas who coined the phrase "Problem Play" in the year 1896. Other scholars took up a critical analysis of form, characterisation and treatment of themes. Each critic defined and labelled these plays according to a touchstone of his own invention. Hence Hamlet is a Problem Play for E.M.W. Tillyard and Antony and Cleopatra and Julius Caesar for Earnest Schanzer.

In this thesis I have chosen to examine three Problem Plays, namely, Measure for Measure, All's Well that Ends Well and Troilus and Cressida with a view to discover, analyse and possibly codify the moral values and ethical principles embodied in them. After a careful reading of these texts one cannot help but conclude that here Shakespeare is taking a realistic, almost cynically satirical look at the facts of life. Many of these same issues have been examined

in the tragedies as well, but there Shakespeare is more intellectual, introspective and metaphysical.

In these three Problem Plays he seems to be more concerned with social life as he found it and presents men and women within mitigating realism. In each play the central action involves some ethical problem or moral stance, and this is my primary concern. To help focus my analysis I have chosen to follow the guidelines of Earnest Schanzer who says that a problem play is one, "in which we find a concern with a moral problem which is central to it, presented in such a manner that we are unsure of our moral bearings so that uncertain and divided, responses to it in the minds of the audience are possible or even probable,"<sup>1</sup> and have in succession applied this approach to each play.

Chapter I is a brief introduction to the Problem Plays, its genre, its parameters and the peculiar features common in the three plays. Here I have relied upon the scholarly work of Tillyard and Schanzer. It is not within the scope of this study to attempt a fresh definition of a Problem Play, but to proceed

---

1. Schanzer, Earnest, "Introduction", The Problem Plays of Shakespeare, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963) p. 6.



to examine the plays to discover the underlying moral issues, if any, and to discover Shakespeare's stand, if possible.

Chapter II deals with Measure for Measure. Here the moral questions that arise are pointed and powerful. Is the law-giver above his own law ? Should the "bed-trick" be accepted as a legitimate device in the cause of justice ? Can one call the Duke's final verdicts as true, just and honest ? Is Angelo a conniving villain or a strong man undone by human passions ? These are some of the questions raised by this play and an attempt has been made to answer them. Lucio and Bernadine are extremely realistic portraits and their comments on the main action of the play reveal some of the ethical dilemmas of the play. The Duke also represents an approach to life rarely seen in any of the earlier plays of Shakespeare.

Chapter III analyses All's Well that Ends Well in much the same manner. Again the bed-trick raises questions of legality and honesty. Does the end justify the means ? Bertram's behaviour towards Helena cannot be called gallant or even husbandly - then how does one justify it ? Is Helena's sacrifice

and devotion unrewarded or wasted ? In this play Shakespeare raises questions of class and its subtle distinctions. Probably this reflected contemporary life when the Puritan middle-class was becoming powerful and important and therefore posing social problems for the upper classes. What Shaw later on refers to as, "middle-class morality" is brought to the fore by Shakespeare in this play.

Chapter IV examines the two chief issues of Troilus and Cressida - love and war. Shakespeare tackles these issues with uncompromising honesty. The glamour and glory of war is balanced by war's ruinous waste and cruelty, and the desire to win by any means. Love is similarly treated as both a romantic passion and a more realistic give-and-take at a physical level. Which position is right ? Who is to be blamed for holding a false position ? Is Cressida a deliberately self-seeking sensualist and can we accept Pandarus' apology for his ways ? These are some of the moral issues which Shakespeare raises and attempts to answer.

In Chapter V, I have attempted to put together my findings and analysis of moral issues in the plays chosen for examination. Throughout I have used Schanzer's definition as a standard of measurement. Shakespeare

seems to have presented problems and social issues which pose certain moral questions. He looks at his world with the questioning eyes of a Socrates and tries to find his answers by placing his characters in certain critical situations noting their responses and reactions and commenting on their decisions. The conclusions arrived at are the result of my personal study and reasoning after a careful perusal of texts and the commentaries by eminent Shakespeare scholars.

\*\*\*\*\*

\*\*\*\*\*  
\*  
\* CHAPTER - I \*  
\*  
\* THE PROBLEM PLAY \*  
\*  
\*\*\*\*\*

## CHAPTER I

### THE PROBLEM PLAY

The so called "Problem Plays" of Shakespeare have been plaguing critica and scholars right from the time when F.S. Boas, in the year 1896, coined the term in the age of Ibsen and Shaw. The term could have served a superficial comparison for sometime only. Instead, it has remained in critical vogue till today.

When Boas grouped All's Well that Ends Well, Measure for Measure, Troilus and Cressida and Hamlet as problem plays, he thought that the plays exhibited certain common problems, enigmas and riddles which defied solutions. In his book, "Shakespeare and his Predecessors", he wrote :

"All these dramas introduce us into highly artificial societies, whose civilization is ripe unto rottenness. Amidst such media abnormal conditions of the brain and emotion are generated and intricate cases of conscience demand a solution by unprecedented methods. Thus throughout these plays we move along dim untrodden paths, and at the close our feeling is neither of simple joy nor pain; we are excited, fascinated perplexed, for the issues raised preclude a completely satisfactory outcome, even when as in All's Well that Ends Well and Measure for Measure, the complications are outwardly adjusted in the fifth act. In Troilus and Cressida and Hamlet no such partial settlement of difficulties

take place, and we are left to interpret their enigmas as best as we may. Dramas so singular in theme and temper, cannot be strictly called comedies or tragedies. We may, therefore, borrow a convenient phrase from the theatre of today and class them together as Shakespeare's problem plays".<sup>1</sup>

The key sentence here is the last one - "a convenient phrase from the theatre of today and class them together as Shakespeare's problem plays." Since Ibsen, Shaw and others were writing plays which were labelled as problem plays, Boas, actually seeing in Shakespeare, a reflection of his contemporary dramatic fashion attached the label of problem plays to these plays. Little did he know that his grouping of the plays as problem plays would spark off controversies among later critics like W.W. Lawrence and Earnest Schanzer.

When Lawrence published his book, Shakespeare's Problem Comedies in 1931, he excluded Hamlet from Boas' grouping of the problem plays, because he felt that the group, problem plays, included those plays which seemed closer to comedies. Since Hamlet is a tragedy, he excluded it from the group. According to him, "Problem comedy is a bastard brother of

---

1. Boas, F.S. by Earnest Schanzer, "Introduction", The Problem Plays of Shakespeare, (London: Routledge and Kegan, 1963) p. 1.

tragedy."<sup>2</sup> Lawrence defines problem plays as follows.

- "The essential characteristic of a problem play, I take it, is that a perplexing and distressing complication in human life is presented in a spirit of high seriousness. This special treatment distinguishes such a play from other kinds of drama, in that the theme is handled so as to arouse not merely interest or excitement, or pity or amusement, but to probe the complicated interactions of character and action, in a situation admitting of different ethical interpretations, - The 'problem' is not like one in mathematics, to which there is a single true solution, but is one of conduct, as to which there are no fixed and immutable laws. Often it cannot be reduced to any formula, any one question, since human life is too complex to be so neatly simplified."<sup>3</sup>

Though Lawrence's definition is very precise, yet the definition and the treatment that he metes out to the three plays is irreconcilable, for each goes in a different direction. Thus we find that the question remains unresolved.

Twenty years later, E.M.W. Tillyard published his book, Shakespeare's Problem Plays (1957) and like

---

2. *ibid* p. 3.

3. *ibid* p. 3.

Boas, he gave a very broad and vague definition and even included Hamlet in his group. He admits the difficulty of defining the problem play and remarks,

"It is anything but a satisfactory term, and I wish I knew a better. All I can do now is to warn the reader that I use it vaguely and equivocally; as a matter of convenience. . . . To achieve the necessary elasticity and inclusiveness, consider the connotations of the parallel term 'problem-child'.

There are at least two kinds of problem child: first the genuinely abnormal child, whom no efforts will ever bring back to normality; and second the child who is interesting and complex rather than abnormal: apt indeed to be a problem for parents and teachers but destined to fulfilment in the larger scope of adult life. Now All's Well and Measure for Measure are like the first problem child: there is something radically schizophrenic about them. Hamlet and Troilus and Cressida are problem plays because they deal with and display interesting problems; All's Well and Measure for Measure because they are problems."<sup>4</sup>

Though the definition has come to have a larger scope by bringing in the resemblance of a 'Problem-child' but it is quite equivocal.

As the difficulty still remained, Schanzer attempted to bring about a more satisfactory definition. He has adopted the opposite approach of Boas, Lawrence

---

4. Tillyard, E.M.W., "Introduction", Shakespeare's Problem Plays, (London : Chatto and Windus, 1957) pp. 1-2.



and Tillyard. He has started by bringing out a satisfactory definition of a problem play and then fitting into it the plays that stand most close to the definition.

For Schanzer, a problem play is one that necessarily deals with a moral problem. He says, "What seems needed as well in a problem-play is a concern with a central moral problem, which will inevitably take the form of an act of choice confronting the protagonist, and in relation to which we are in doubt of our moral bearings."<sup>5</sup>

Schanzer feels that the moral problem should not only be central to the play, rather, it should be presented in such a manner that the audience must also be perplexed about the inevitable solution (if any does emerge). He says Macbeth is also confronted with a moral choice-whether to murder Duncan or not- but then the audience are not affected by this confusion. Therefore, it cannot be called a problem play. A problem play, for him must necessarily make the audience think of a solution. It should attempt to present enigmas, problems, not solve them.

---

5. Schanzer, Earnest, "Introduction", The Problem Plays of Shakespeare, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London (1963). p.5.

Arguing from this angle, he presents the following definition of a problem play, "A play in which we find a concern with a moral problem which is central to it, presented in such a manner that we are unsure of our moral bearings, so that uncertain and divided responses to it in the minds of the audience are possible or even probable."<sup>6</sup>

Since the definition offered by Schanzer, appears to be the closest to the focus of this thesis, I have adopted it for my study.

Thus two points emerge very clearly; first, that the play deals with a moral problem and secondly that it generates "uncertain and divided responses." Reviewed from this angle, I include All's Well that Ends Well, Measure for Measure and Troilus and Cressida in the category of a problem play. All these plays fulfil the two important conditions laid down by Schanzer, viz - that problem play should deal with a moral problem that is central to it and that it should generate "uncertain and divided responses."

---

6. *ibid* p. 6.

Though no attempt is hereby made to define a problem play, one must not neglect the characteristics of a problem play. The point of enquiry here are the moral issues in three plays which every scholar accepts as "Problem Plays."

The first important characteristic of a problem play that runs through all the plays mentioned above is that Shakespeare seems to be "concerned with a religious dogma or abstract speculation or both."<sup>7</sup> This religious dogma or abstract speculation, proved so disturbing to the dramatist that it impelled him to express them and call the attention of the audience towards them rather than call for a solution. If Measure for Measure deals with the abstraction whether justice be meted out or mercy be granted, then All's Well with the concept whether those who are low-born, but noble in character are more righteous or those who are simply high born but unethical, be considered righteous. Similarly, Troilus and Cressida deals with the speculation-whether worship can be only of a worthy object or whether it can invest the object with a worthiness not its own. It also examines the ethics of war and love.

---

7. Tillyard, E.M.W. "Introduction", Shakespeare's Problem Plays, (London : Chatto and Windus, 1957) p. 3.

The second, noteworthy characteristic of a problem play is that there is "an acute interest in observing and recording the details of human nature"<sup>8</sup> especially the darker aspects. In Measure for Measure we find Shakespeare absorbed in portraying the hypocrisy and double standards of Angelo, in All's Well that Ends Well Shakespeare realistically portrays the stunted moral growth of Bertram and in Troilus and Cressida we find Shakespeare probing the oddities of a whole group of interesting characters. Shakespeare brings about realistic portrayals of Troilus' lack of moral courage, Cressida's wantonness, the swollen-headedness of Achilles and the mean Machiavellian tactics of Ulysses.

A strange characteristic that runs through all the three plays is that in it "a young man gets a shock"<sup>9</sup> and it is only on receiving these shocks that these men mature. Claudio gets the shock just as the play begins and it is due to this shock that he matures. He has definitely grown up for when the Provost asks him the whereabouts of Bernandine, he coolly replies -

"As fast lock'd up in sleep as guiltless labour  
When it lies starkly in the traveller's bones,  
He will not wake."

(Act IV, Sc II, l 63-65)

---

8. *ibid* p. 5.

9. *ibid* p. 6.

These lines indicate a marked process of growth. Similarly Bertram gets repeated shocks. His first shock is to get married to one he considers beneath him; his second is to undergo a long series of surprises and alarms on the night before he leaves Florence to return to France; the disturbing letter of his mother, the shocking news of his wife's death and above all the shocking revelations before the King, brings out a different Bertram in him. In Troilus and Cressida, Troilus undergoes two shocks and these shocks bring about a more mature personality. His first shock is to be separated from Cressida and second to witness her infidelity.

Interestingly enough, the shocks that trigger off the maturing process take place in the night. By this Shakespeare is perhaps trying to indicate that the "most significant growth takes place unseen and in silence."<sup>10</sup>

Another remarkable characteristic of these plays is that Shakespeare shows "interest in the old and the new generation and in old and new habits of thought."<sup>11</sup> In Measure for Measure, for instance,

---

10. *ibid* pp.8-9.

11. *ibid* p. 9.

the contrast in the old and the new ways of thinking is brought forward in the opposite views of the Duke and Angelo. The Duke, who stands for mercy, represents the old, and Angelo's demand for justice throw light on the new world order. Similarly, in All's Well that Ends Well, the world of the old and the world of the young are strangely contrasted by the Countess of Rousillon and the king of France whereas the young is represented by Bertram. The young may have energy and strong will but not the graciousness and elegance of the old. Troilus and Cressida also brings out the sharp contrast between the ancients and the moderns. The Trojans are antique, anachronistically chivalrous, and rather inefficient, the Greeks are the new men, ruthless and though quarrelsome and unpleasant, less inefficient than the Trojans.

Last but not the least, the common denominator that holds all the plays together is the concern with a moral problem. All's Well and Measure for Measure abound in moral statements whereas in Troilus and Cressida a kind of choric morality emerges. The famous "degree" speech in Act I, Sc III emphasises a kind of choric morality.

In each case the chief characters are torn apart by the ambiguity and dichotomy of their particular moral problem. The spectators too are drawn from one side to the other-- is justice greater than Mercy ? Is the glory of war an excuse for ruin and suffering which it brings ?

\*\*\*\*\*

\*\*\*\*\*

★

★ CHAPTER - II ★

★

★ MEASURE FOR MEASURE ★

★

\*\*\*\*\*



## MEASURE FOR MEASURE

Most probably it was in the fortieth year of his highly productive life as a playwright that William Shakespeare staged the play, Measure for Measure for James I. It was first printed in the Folio of 1623, along with the three comedies - The Tempest The Two Gentlemen of Verona and The Merry Wives of Windsor.

There is probably no other play by Shakespeare which has perplexed critics as much as the play under consideration, nor one which has aroused such violent, eccentric and mutually opposed responses.

The earliest critics of the play were John Dryden, Dr. Johnson and Coleridge, and all three were vehemently critical of this play as they found something lacking in the play - lacking in its form, as it was neither a full-fledged tragedy nor a full-fledged comedy.

It is not just the form that is questionable, but the general atmosphere which breathes of vice and loose morality, its plot full of intrigues and artifices that has forced the alert critical reader to question and probe the many moral dilemmas that crop up during the course of the play.

This chapter attempts to unravel the labyrinths of critical commentary and arrive at a comprehensive view about the morality projected in the play.

The first adverse critical comment came from the critic Samuel Taylor Coleridge when he commented thus - "This play which is Shakespeare's throughout, is to me, the most painful - say rather, the only painful part of his genuine works. The comic and the tragic equally border on the *wonderful*, the one disgusting and other horrible . . . "In his Table Talk June 24, 1827 he remarks, "It is a hateful work, our feelings of justice are grossly wounded in Angelo's escape. Isabella herself contrives to be unamiable, and Claudio is detestable."<sup>1</sup> Even Hazlitt, who praises the play for its genius and wisdom, complains of its "lack of passion".<sup>2</sup>

The Victorians while assessing the artistic validity of the play, expressed similar opinions. The Victorian attitude is well summed up in Walter Raleigh's comments, "In criticism of Measure for Measure, we are commonly presented with a picture of Vienna as

- 
1. Coleridge's Shakespeare Criticism, Coleridge, S.T. ed. T.M. Raysor, (vol. 1. 1930) p. 113, vol. 2, p. 352.
  2. Hazlitt, Characters of Shakespeare's Plays, Everyman edition, (1817-18) p. 245.

a black-pit of seething wickedness; and against this background rises the dazzling, white and saintly figure of Isabella."<sup>3</sup>

The debate does not end here. The most fiery critical onslaught is felt in the words of Una Ellis Fearnor when she wrote that in Measure for Measure, "the lowest depths of Jacobean negation are touched, cynicism has taken on a kind of diabolic vigilance, with the exception of the kindly, timid Provost, there is no character who is not suspect, and those whose claims to goodness or decency seem most vigorous are precisely those in whom meanness, self-regard, and hypocrisy root deepest."<sup>4</sup>

It was the twentieth century which, with its liberal approach to morality, adopts a much more tolerant attitude. Time and again critics have expressed the opinion that the play exuberates with a 'Christian' spirit. Notable among these are R.W. Chambers,<sup>5</sup> G. Wilson Knight,<sup>6</sup> Roy Battenhouse,<sup>7</sup> E.T. Selzer,<sup>8</sup> and Nevill Coghill.<sup>9</sup>

---

3. Raleigh, Walter, Shakespeare, (1907) pp.165-66.

4. Fearnor, Una Ellis, The Jacobean Drama, (1936), p.260.

5. Chambers, R.W. Man's Unconquerable Mind, (1939) p. 277 ff.

6. Knight, G. Wilson, The Wheel of Fire, (O.U.P. 1933) p.p. 88ff.

7. "Measure for Measure and Christian doctrine of Atonement" P.M.L.A. vol 61 (1946) pp. 1029ff.

8. Vergebung und Gnade bei Shakespeare, (1952)

9. "Comic Form in Measure for Measure" Shakespeare Survey, vol. 8(1955) pp. 14ff.

R.W. Chambers, in his influential British Academy Lecture on 'The Jacobean Shakespeare and Measure for Measure' (1937), insisted upon the argument that the play is informed of the Christian spirit.

G. Wilson Knight insists that the play is largely structured on the Gospels, a parable exemplifying Christ's dictum in the Sermon on the Mount :

Judge not, that ye be not judged.  
For with what judgement ye judge, ye shall  
be judged:  
and with what measure ye mete, it shall be  
measured to you again.

(Mathew viii)

Knight argues that through this play, Shakespeare is trying to give the message that man does not have the right to judge, the final authority to judge lies in the hands of the Almighty -

Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord...

The ordinary mortals have only the right to grant pardon and forgive the sins done unto us. It is on the basis of this argument that he justifies the pardon granted to Angelo by the Duke at the end of the play.

Continuing his argument, he goes on to say that the Duke is like Christ. He has been granted superhuman powers. He says,

The Duke is the lord of this play in the exact sense that Prospero is lord of The Tempest, is the prophet of an enlightened ethic.<sup>10</sup> He controls the action from start to finish, he allots, as it were, praise and blame, he is lit at moments with divine suggestion comparable with his almost divine power of fore-knowledge, and control, and wisdom. There is an enigmatic, otherworldly, mystery suffusing his figure and the meaning of his acts : their result, however, in each case justifies their initiation- wherein we see the allegorical nature of the play, since the plot is so arranged that each person receives his deserts in the light of the Duke's- which is really the Gospel-ethic.

G. Wilson Knight is of the opinion that mercy is greater than justice. This concept is found even in The Merchant of Venice but is more explicitly expressed in Measure for Measure. To clarify his argument he cites the following speech of Isabella,

-Well, believe this :  
No ceremony, that to great one longs,  
Not the King's Crown, nor the deputed sword,  
The marshal's truncheon, nor the judge's robe,  
Become them with one half so good a grace  
As mercy does.

(Act II, Sc II, 1 58-62)

---

10. Knight, G. Wilson, "Measure for Measure and the Gospels", The Wheel of Fire, (O.U.P. 1930) p. 74.

and says that

These thoughts are repetition of those in Portia's famous 'mercy' speech. There, they come as sudden, gleaming almost irrelevant beam of ethical imagination. But here they are not irrelevant : they are intrinsic with the thought of the whole play, the pivot of its movement. In The Merchant of Venice the Gospel reference is explicit :

--We do pray for mercy;  
And that same prayer doth teach us all to render  
The deeds of mercy.

And the central idea of Measure for Measure is this :

And forgive us our debts as we forgive  
our debtors.

(Matthew, VI, 12)

Thus 'justice' is a mockery; man himself a sinner cannot presume to judge. That is the lesson driven home in Measure for Measure<sup>10a</sup>

In 1931 W.W. Lawrence published his book, The Problem Comedies and in it he expressed the opinion that while introducing the bed-trick, Shakespeare has in fact followed the theatrical convention. He views

---

10a. Ibid. pp.75-76.

the play from the angle of stagibility and comes to the conclusion that the plot of Measure for Measure the artifice involved cannot be explained on a 'rationalistic basis'<sup>11</sup> but it all conforms with the spirit and convention of drama. He writes,

The basic theme of Measure for Measure . . . may apparently be ultimately traced to an episode in real life . . . It is not poignantly real, but intensely dramatic. It presents one of those dreadful alternatives between conflicting demands of honour and affection which have in them the very essence of tragic drama. A beautiful and innocent woman pleads with a tyrannical official for the life of her lover or brother or husband, and is given the choice between yielding her honour to save the man she loves, or refusing, and thereby knowing that his death is assured . . .

In Shakespeare's play this realistic basic action is combined with plot-material taken from traditional story, and exhibiting the archaisms and improbabilities characteristic of such narrative . . . The extraordinary thing is that while the main situation apparently stirred Shakespeare very deeply, and while he gave to it a power such as no other writer had attained, he made it in some respects more conventional, less like real life.<sup>12</sup>

---

11. Lawrence, W.W. "Real life and Artifice", (Casebook series) p. 122.

12. *Ibid* p. 121.

Not only is the plot justified by Lawrence, but even the character of the Duke is defended on grounds of dramatic necessity. He comments, "The ruler of the degenerate city of Vienna is, I believe, to be regarded as a conventional and romantic figure, whose actions are mainly determined by theatrical exigencies and effectiveness; he is as it were, a stage Duke not a real person."<sup>13</sup>

E.M.W. Tillyard follows the same line of argument as W.W. Lawrence. In his essay "Measure for Measure" which forms an integral part of his book, Shakespeare's Problem Plays, Tillyard says that in Measure for Measure, Shakespeare has blended folklore with poetry, and it is in this perspective that the play should be read. He goes on to say that in writing Measure for Measure, Shakespeare was inspired by the Moralities, and if we keep this view in mind, the play assumes the form of an allegory which is vividly expressed in the final scene. He writes, "The other way to find the play faultless is to cut out all the Bradleian character-stuff from the start and go straight to idea or allegory or symbols. There is much thought and much orthodoxy in Measure for Measure, and during the time when

---

13. *ibid.* p.121.



Shakespeare was writing the Problem Plays he had the Morality form rather prominently in his mind.<sup>14</sup>

Furthermore, Tillyard, finds the Duke, an allegorical figure, symbolising the Christian spirit of forgiveness and mercy-

I will have mercy and not sacrificC.

(Matthew. Ch. 9. V, 13,

He goes on to say, "... the Duke contains hints of heavenly grace and that he embodies a higher justice than mere legality."<sup>15</sup>

These are the views of two major critics who view the play from the angle of its stagibility. Earnest Schanzer presents yet another view regarding the play. In his essay "Justice and King James in Measure for Measure," Schanzer agrees with Albrectht and maintains that the play was written "as an act of homage to the king upon his accession to the throne of England."<sup>16</sup> Schanzer points out yet another argument forwarded by Albrectht that Measure for Measure was written "from first to last, with an eye upon the King's special interests and predilections."<sup>17</sup> Schanzer is himself of the opinion that the Duke is largely modelled on

<sup>14</sup>.

<sup>15</sup>. ibid p. 122.

<sup>16</sup>. Albrecht referred by Earnest Schanzer, "Justice and King James in Measure for Measure" (Case book series) p. 234.

<sup>17</sup> Tillyard, E.H.W., "Measure for Measure", Shakespeare's Problem Plays, (Chatto and Windus, 1957) p.121.

<sup>14</sup>14. Tillyard, E.H.W., 'Measure for Measure' Shakespeare's Problem Plays, (Chatto and Windus, 1957) p.121.

James I. He says, "It seems to me, then, that the view that in the Duke Shakespeare drew an image of James, partly as he was, partly as he would have been or was then thought to be, is supported by too much evidence to be dismissed. And it may help to account for another fact often remarked upon by critics; the shadowiness of the Duke, compared to the other main *dramatis personae*."<sup>18</sup>

A close examination of the play reveals that the whole atmosphere, action and the plot is shrouded in a mist of ambiguity. It leaves us baffled. The play thus conforms to Schanzer's definition of a problem play when he says that a problem play is one, ". . . in which we find a concern with a moral problem which is central to it, presented in such a manner that we are unsure of our moral bearings, so that uncertain and divided responses to it in the minds of the audience are possible or even probable."<sup>19</sup>

The play abounds in such moral issues which leave us baffled and unsure of our responses. The first such issue is- how far is the Duke morally correct in relinquishing his office. He has decided to leave the city of Vienna and move on to Poland after entrusting sovereign powers in the hands of Angelo. He says -

---

18. *ibid.* p. 234

We have with special soul  
Elected him our absence to supply;  
Lent him our terror, drest him with our love,  
and given his deputation all the organs  
of our own power.

(Act I, Sc I, l. 18-20)

and goes even further

Hold therefore, Angelo.  
In our remove, be thou at full ourself.  
Mortality and mercy in Vienna  
Live in thy tongue, and heart.

(Act I, Sc I, l. 41-44)

Thus it is clear that the Duke has handed over all official responsibilities to Angelo and has decided to leave for Poland. This he declares publicly, but in reality, he does not leave the city of Vienna. As a matter of fact, he meets Friar Thomas and requests him to lend him his habit so that he can disguise himself as a Friar and oversee the administration as carried out by Angelo.

The Duke explains to Friar Thomas that though the city of Vienna had "strict statutes" and most biting laws" yet over the years they have lost their credibility. As laws have not been enforced with due strictness they are now "more mock'd than fear'd" and so

Dead to infliction, to themselves are dead,  
And liberty plucks justice by the nose,

The baby beats the nurse, and quite athwart  
Goes all decorum.

(Act I, Sc III, 1 27-30)

Though the Duke holds himself responsible  
for this sorry state, yet he does not work to set  
things right, rather decides to appoint Angelo as  
his deputy to set things right. He says:

I do fear, too dreadful.  
Sith 'twas my fault to give the people scope,  
'Twould be my tyranny to astrike and gall  
them  
For what I bid them do: for we bid this be  
done,  
When evil deeds have their permissive pass,  
And not the punishment. Therefore indeed,  
I have on Angelo impos'd the office;

---

And to behold his sway,  
I will, as 'twere a brother of your order,  
Visit both prince and people.

(Act I, Sc III, 1 34-45)

Can such a step on the part of the Duke be  
justified? Is it cowardice or diplomacy? He knows  
fully well that Vienna has become a "black-pit of  
seething wickedness"<sup>20</sup> a state where-

Corruption boil and bubble  
Till it o'errun the stew:

(Act V, Sc I, 1 316)

---

20. Raleigh, Walter, referred by Ernest Schanzer, "Measure for Measure", The Problem Plays of Shakespeare, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963) p. 71.

and then instead of fulfilling his moral duty to set things right, he leaves the city and above all disguises himself as a Friar, to oversee the administration of Angelo. Can such a step be morally justified ? - if so, on what grounds ? Does this not amount to laying a trap whereby Angelo's integrity may be tested ?

This peculiar stance adopted by the Duke is perhaps not so difficult to explain. The moral angle would suggest that like God the Duke gives laws and then allows men to obey or not and be rewarded or punished accordingly.

But if ye will not obey the voice of the Lord, but rebel against the commandment of the Lord, then shall the Land of the Lord be against you.

(I Samu<sup>l</sup>. Ch 12. V 15)

This peculiar stance can also be justified in light of the argument so forcefully expressed by Lawrence-

The ruler of the degenerate city of Vienna is, I believe, to be regarded as a conventional and romantic figure, whose actions are mainly determined by <sup>21</sup>theatrical exigencies and effectiveness.

---

21. Lawrence, p. 125.

Another important situation that comes up for a close enquiry is: how far is Claudio's guilt worthy of condemnation? In Shakespearean times an engagement or betrothal was as good as a marriage. So can one justifiably accuse Claudio of transgressing the law?

Yet another point that crops up with this issue and which needs careful analysis is-how far is Angelo just and morally correct in condemning and punishing Claudio when in due course of time, he commits the same sin?

Escalus, who is more experienced in the art of administration and is more seasoned in the affairs of the state very rightly defends Claudio by saying that Claudio's offence should not be treated with such strict and extreme measures as he has only been misled and had he (i.e. Angelo) been placed in similar circumstances, he would have acted in much the same manner. He says-

Let but your honour know-  
whom I believe to be most strait in virtue-

That in the working of your own affections,  
Had time coher'd with place, or place with  
wishing,  
Or that the resolute acting of your blood  
Could have attain'd th'effect of your own  
purpose,

Whether you had not sometime in your life  
Err'd in this point, which now you censure

And pull'd the law upon you.

(Act II, Sc I, 1 8-15)

This is a very Biblical response. No man  
ought to think himself greater than his brother.  
It is Angelo's reply that is worth noting. He says -

'Tis one thing to be tempted, Escalus,  
Another thing to fall.

(Act II, Sc I, 1 16)

This snob who pretends to be righteous and  
who takes great pride in his unsullied reputation-

My unsoil'd name, th' austereness of my life,  
My vouch against you,

(Act II, Sc IV, 1 55)

falls an easy victim to his lascivious desires  
on seeing Claudio's sister Isabella. He is like the  
Pharisee in the Bible.

The name Angelo is significant. He resembles  
the "fallen angel". This self-righteous prig who  
falls an easy victim to the temptations of the flesh  
is audacious enough to condemn a man like himself  
for a like sin. Can he be considered just in his  
behaviour ? Aligned with the issue, is the question  
whether Angelo is right in punishing Claudio or not?

The sentence that he metes out to Claudio, appears extreme and tyrannical, but when one views Angelo as an administrator, one has to keep aside other considerations and concentrate on the duties of an officer who has been entrusted sovereign powers by the absent monarch to grant justice to the people. It thus becomes his prime duty to punish the wrongdoer and hence Angelo orders Claudio's execution. One has to examine the situation in the light of G.Wilson Knight's argument, "when he is first faced with the problem of Claudio's guilt of adultery - and commanded, we must presume, by the Duke's sealed orders to execute stern punishment wholesale, for this is the Duke's ostensible purpose - Angelo pursues his course without any sense of wrongdoing."<sup>22</sup> Viewing the situation from this angle, one can perhaps grant Angelo the right to punish Claudio.

The other aspect which goes on to puzzle an alert audience/reader is-how far is Angelo morally correct in condemning Claudio. Angelo reminds one of the Parable of the Unmerciful Servant. (Matt. Ch. 18, V. 23 -35)

Perhaps this is not a serious sin on his part and one can dismiss this oddity in his character

---

22. Knight, G. Wilson, "Measure for Measure and the Gospels", The Wheel of Fire, (London: O.U.P. 1930) p. 85



as one emerging out of a lack of self-knowledge. Angelo freely indulges in self-deception. Though he condemns sexual passions, yet falls an easy victim to it. Perhaps it is this lack of self-knowledge that makes him condemn Claudio, Wilson Knight defends him in the following words - "Angelo is not a conscious hypocrite : rather a man whose chief faults are self - deception and pride in his own righteousness . . . . Angelo, indeed, does not know himself : no one receives so great a shock as he himself when temptation overthrows his virtue. He is no hypocrite. He cannot however, be acquitted of pharisaical pride."<sup>23</sup>

Seen from this angle, the play conforms with the Renaissance ideal of self-knowledge which was borrowed from the Greeks. Through this character, what Shakespeare is perhaps trying to suggest is that the most fruitful moral stance one can adopt towards life would be to know oneself. King Lear says, "Will no one tell me what I am ?" Thus self-knowledge is the best of all knowledge. Since Angelo lacks this awareness, he suffers. Perhaps this is the moral message that Shakespeare wants to drive home.

---

23. *ibid* p. 85.

He stands as much in need of sympathy as Macbeth. Both have fallen a victim to the tragic flaws in their characters - in case of Macbeth, it is his over riding ambition, whereas in case of Angelo, it is his pharisaical - pride. As such the condition that he lays down before Isabella to set her brother free, seems infuriating at the outset, but when one studies his character in depth, we realise that it was but natural of him to fall a victim of Isabella's "enskied" charm.

Seen in the Elizabethan context, this peculiar attitude of Angelo may not be considered immoral. Sudden arousal of desire and its gratification were common. In the Elizabethan world this was not considered very immoral, rather it was dismissed as human folly.

At this juncture, one is forced to ask oneself is it simply because of his lack of self-knowledge or pharisaical pride that Angelo acts thus or is there any other reason for it. Perhaps there is.

There is a psychological explanation for it. The man who imagined himself to be a saint is suddenly confronted with another real saint - Isabella .

Her ascetic purity enslaves him. He "has not been overcome with evil. He has been ensnared by good."<sup>24</sup> As soon as Angelo is confronted with this saint, all his idealism crumbles and he gives into his temptations. Angelo thus resembles the "fallen angel". One feels inclined to conform to the views of G. Wilson Knight :

Angelo is swiftly enwrapped in desire. He is finely shown as falling a prey to his own love of purity and ascetism :

What is't I dream on ?  
O cunning enemy, that to catch a saint,  
With saints dost bait thy hook !

His 'sins in loving virtue'; no strumpet could ever allure him; Isabella subdues him utterly-now he who built so strongly on a rational righteousness, understands for the first time the sweet unreason of love:

Ever till now,  
When men were fond, I smiled and wonder'd

(Act II, Sc II, l 186)

Angelo struggles hard : he prays to Heaven, but his thoughts 'anchor' on Isabella (II, IV, 4). His gravity and learning all are suddenly as nothing. . . . He surrenders - his ideals all toppled over like ninepins.<sup>25</sup>

Angelo's reaction goes hand in hand with the psychological conception of the character. A man who has curbed his passions for so long, who has not known sexual desire, is more likely to be tempted and above all carried away by his overpowering

24. *ibid.* p. 88.

25. *ibid.* p. 87.

passions that it would ultimately lead to violent lust. In his great defence of this lovable villain, Wilson Knight writes :

Angelo is now quite adrift : all his old contacts are irrevocably severed, sexual desire has long been an anathema to him, so his warped idealism forbids any healthy love. Good and evil change places in his mind, since this passion is immediately recognised as good, yet, by every one of his stock judgements, condemned as evil. The devil becomes a 'good angel'. And this wholesale reversion leaves Angelo in sorry plight now: he has no moral values left. Since sex has been synonymous with foulness in his mind, his new love, reft from the start of moral sanction in a man who 'scarcely confesses that his blood flows',<sup>26</sup> becomes swiftly a devouring and curbless lust :

Angelo is perhaps not a villain. He is rather a victim of his 'Pharisaical pride'. He resembles one of those intellectuals who are far removed from the realities of everyday life and hence an easy prey to their own weaknesses. One is here again reminded of the words of G. Wilson Knight :

This is the reward of self-deception, of Pharisaical pride, of an idealism not harmonised with instinct. . . . Angelo is the symbol of a false intellectualised ethic divorced from the deeper springs of human instinct.<sup>27</sup>

---

26. *ibid.* pp. 87-88.

27. *ibid.* pp. 88-89.

Seen in this light, Angelo's acceptance of his crimes, (on being exposed) and his consequent entreaty to be pardoned appear quite natural. Even his final acquittal seems justified. A man like him indulging in self-deception need not be sentenced to death. He must be shown the right path and set free to adopt for himself the right course of action which is based on a complete and fuller understanding of the realities of life. Thus the moment he accepts his guilt, his eyes are opened, he finally comes closer to the human aspects of life and thus the Duke sets him free. Self-realisation is all, and the best punishment that can be meted out to sinners like Angelo. This is the link with the greater tragedies where the hero at the end comes to self-knowledge and understanding—"Will no one tell me what I am?"—(King Lear)

When his follies are exposed, he is frightened and says,

Immediate sentence then and sequent death,  
Is all the grace I beg.

(Act V, Sc II, 1 378)

Commenting on this G. Wilson Knight says,

To Angelo, exposure seems to come as a relief: the horror of self-deception is at an end. For the first time in his life he is both quite honest with himself and with the world. So he takes Mariana as his wife . . .<sup>28</sup>  
He has become human. The union is symbolical.

---

28. *Ibid.* pp. 94.

Angelo and Lucio are both meted out almost the same punishment. Wilson Knight states -

The punishment of both is this only : to know and to be themselves. This is both their punishment and at the same time their highest-reward for their sufferings : self-knowledge being the supreme and the only, good. We remember the parable of<sup>29</sup> the Pharisee and the Publican (Luke xviii).

Thus while analysing the reactions and motivations of Angelo we are reminded of Schanzer's remark that there are "uncertain and divided responses".

Interwoven with this aspect of the plot is the baffling presence of the Duke, his intrigues and craftiness. The moral issues related to the Duke are many. The first question that is almost synonymous with this dramatic-personae is, can he be allowed to be present everywhere? how and on what grounds is his prying presence justified ? Is he not an eavesdropper?

The answer has to be as equivocal as the "shadowiness"<sup>30</sup> involved in his character. The Duke is not an ordinary figure. He is the Prince of Vienna, which has become a hot-bed of vice and immorality. It thus becomes his moral duty to set things right,

---

29. *ibid.* pp. 94-95.

30. Lawrence, p. 125

but then he realises that for fourteen years he has allowed things to take their natural course. So now he feels he has no right to enforce strict measures as it would amount to tyranny on his part. Perhaps the only option open to him was to live in disguise. He thus relinquishes his responsibility as the Duke, appoints Angelo as his deputy and adopts the guise of a Friar, simply to enlighten himself about the state of affairs in Vienna. This enlightenment he may not have acquired otherwise, had he remained in office. Judging the Duke's action from this ground, he can be pardoned. Laurence asserts :

The picture of the Duke, . . . his retirement and the appointment <sup>of</sup> a deputy, are natural and plausible, . . .<sup>31</sup>

Related to the dilemma of the Duke in disguise is yet another question, how far is the Duke morally right in spying upon the administration as carried out by Angelo ? Does this act not amount to prying ? Is he not laying a trap for Angelo ? Many critics have answered in the affirmative. But this act needs to be minutely examined before a final judgement is passed.

The Duke's abdication and his consequent wandering in disguise are not frivolous acts. The

---

31. *Ibid.* p. 131.

Duke in his attempt to oversee the administration of Vienna in the disguise of a Friar, is in reality trying to know for himself how good at heart are those officers who pretend to be honest and upright in the discharge of their duties. Angelo is held in high esteem by one and all for his austerity and nobility of character. The Duke wants to test this much publicised integrity of Angelo. He tells Friar Thomas :

None reasons for this action  
 At our more leisure shall I render you;  
 Only this one: lord Angelo is precise;  
 Stands at a guard with envy, scarce confesses  
 That his blood flows; or that his appetite  
 Is more to bread than stone. Hence shall

If power change purpose, what our seemers  
 be.

(Act I, Sc III, 148-54 ).

The Duke wants to know the real Angelo and hence his plan to remain in disguise is not unjustified. G. Wilson Knight in defence of the Duke writes :

"The Duke's sense of human responsibility is delightful throughout : . . . The Duke, disguised as the Friar, moves through the play, a dark figure, directing, watching, moralising on the action of other persons. As the play progresses and his plot on Angelo works he assumes an ever-increasing mysterious dignity, his original purpose seems to become more and more profound in human insight, . . ."



These two initial actions of the Duke are much criticised and yet pardoned and this is the essence of a problem play. But the craft applied by the Duke in setting things right, viz. the bed-trick and the substitution of one female character for the other, is a subject of much vehement criticism. Coleridge considers the substitution "degrading to the character of women".<sup>33</sup>

The Duke is often criticised for being Machiavellian in his designs. For him, it is the end that matters, not the means. If the actions of the Duke are restricted to the narrow cause and effect relationship, then the charges against the Duke seem justified. But in order to arrive at a comprehensive understanding of the actions of the Duke, one will have to enlarge the scope of his actions. Such an enlargement would throw light on the ethical connotation of his varied actions.

"He is like a kindly father, and all the rest are his children."<sup>34</sup> As a father, it thus becomes his duty to forward such a solution to the much entangled problem, wherein lies the interest of all

---

33. Coleridge, S.T. referred by W.W. Lawrence, "Real Life and Artifice", (Casebook series), p. 132.

34. Knight, p. 79.

the parties concerned. The Duke had no other alternative to save the life of Claudio except to ask Isabella to conform to the conditions of Angelo, and if she were to follow this to the letter and spirit, it would have resulted in a disaster. Hence, the introduction of Mariana and her consequent substitution in place of Isabella. Only by such a cleverly contrived plan is the Duke able to diffuse the tension and do justice to all. Claudio's life is saved, Isabella's honour remains unblemished and the much wronged Mariana is united with Angelo. The circumstances and the plot necessitates the use of craft.

Craft against vice I must apply.  
 With Angelo tonight shall lie  
 His old bathrothed, but despised:  
 So disguise shall by th'disguised  
 Pay with falsehood false exacting,  
 And perform an old contracting.

(Act III, Sc II l 270-275)

The Duke is more than once referred to as a superhuman power controlling the actions of the play, punishing and rewarding men and women according to their actions. Assuming divine proportions, the Duke grants pardon to Angelo. Though he and his judgement is much criticised, in reality it reinforces the 'Christian' spirit of forgiveness. In more than one way, the Duke symbolises Divine

Power in the Christian sense. He is omnipotent, he tests, he rewards and above all he forgives those who repent. The prayers of Isabella and Mariana on behalf of Angelo become all the more potent when this aspect is considered.

Further, the pardon granted to Angelo by the Duke affirms life, not negates it. Had Angelo been executed, Mariana would have been wronged. Therefore he is brought to a state of self-knowledge and restored to society. Execution and death sentence speak of mere legality, but a punishment that opens the eyes of the sinners, speak of mercy. Further Shskespeare was too great an artist to present a nihilistic picture of life. Therefore he makes the Duke his instrument to pardon Angelo.

The Duke, like Jesus, is the prophet of a new order of ethics. . . . where justice is tempered with tolerance and mercy.<sup>35</sup>

This is a favourite theme of Shskespeare. We find hints of this in Portia's speech in The Merchant of Venice and is the foundation of The Tempest.

The final judgement of the Duke reflects the message of the Gospels -

---

35. *ibid.* 80.

Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgement ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.

(*Matthew*, vii. V.1.)

Analysing the play from these angles, the charges levelled against the Duke seem baseless. His attitude towards life is highly ethical and strongly christian-where mercy supercedes all human motives. The claims of mercy are greater than the demands of justice. Man who is himself a sinner cannot presume to judge.

The Biblical overtones are strongly carried over in the actions of the Duke as is noted by G. Wilson Knight-

The Duke is, in fact, a symbol of the same kind as the father in the Parable of the Prodigal Son (*Luke* XV) or the Lord in that of the Unmerciful Servant (*Matthew* XVIII). The simplest way to focus correctly the quality and unity of Measure for Measure is<sup>36</sup> to read it on the analogy of Jesus' parables.

The Duke presents Christian, tyrannical and irrationally impulsive reactions at the same time leaving the reader/spectator in uncertainty as to his motives.

---

36. *Ibid.* p. 83.

The moral dilemmas in the play are associated not only with the Duke and Angelo but encompass Isabella, Lucio and Claudio as well.

Isabella is one of those heroines of Shakespeare who is loved and hated at the same time. Some admire her "enslaved" purity whereas others criticise her for this very ascetic purity, calling her "cold"<sup>37</sup> and "hard as icicle."<sup>38</sup>

The moral dilemmas here are-how moral is she in maintaining her "ice-cold sanctity"<sup>39</sup> and thereby allowing her brother to die? Secondly, how far is she morally correct in falling in with the Duke's plan of substitution and above all is she really correct in forgiving Angelo at the end of the play?

We are introduced to this saintly figure in the concluding scene (IV scene) of the opening Act (Act I). She is virtue personified. Her first statement reveals her ascetic purity and her great love for saintly existence. She says -

---

37. *Ibid.* p. 91.

38. Fernor, Una Ellis, quote cited by Earnest Schanzer in "Measure for Measure", The Problem Plays of Shakespeare (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1963), p.72.

39. Knight, p.92.

But rather wishing a more strict restraint  
Upon the sisters stood, the votarists of  
Saint "Luce"

(Act I, Sc IV 4-5)

One simply cannot resist admiring this chaste woman, who in the prime of her youth has decided to forego the pleasures of life and has instead accepted the strict restraints of the nunnery. Is she to be despised for this renunciation and saintliness of hers ? Perhaps not. It is a virtue to be honoured and hence even Lucio, the "lapwing" and "jester" treats her with respect and admiration. He says-

'Tis true.

I would not, though 'tis my familiar sin,  
With maids to seem the lapwing, and to jest  
Tongue far from heart, play with all virgins so

I hold you as a thing enskied and sainted  
By your renouncement, an immortal spirit,  
And to be talk'd with in sincerity,  
As with a saint.

(Act I, Sc IV, l 30-37)

She is no ordinary figure, rather a thing "enskied" and "sainted". Her contempt for the world and love for purity has made her a saint. R.W. Chambers in his great defence of the character, calls her a martyr. He says-

For all her silence and modesty, Isabel has  
the ferocity of a martyr.<sup>40</sup>

40. Quote referred by Schanzer, Earnest, p. 97.

According to him, she displays the great zeal, so peculiar among martyrs, to sacrifice their life for a noble cause. She is ready to lay down her life in order to save her brother from the clutches of Angelo. Pleading for this noble cause she says-

Sir, believe this :  
I had rather give my body than my soul.

(Act II, Sc IV 1-55)

Isabella has not only the ferocity and contempt for temporal life of the christian martyrs, but also as has been remarked by F.R. Leavis, she is capable of experiencing a "kind of sensuality of martyrdom"<sup>41</sup>

Love for ascetic purity such as the one cherished by Isabella is praise worthy, but once this love comes closer to a self-centered saintliness, it assumes negative proportions. For all her saintliness, Isabella "shows a distressing lack of warmth."<sup>42</sup> Presenting her appeals of mercy before Angelo, Isabella appears rather luke warm. It is Lucio who has to urge her continuously and when Angelo

---

41. Leavis, F.R. "The Greatness of Measure for Measure", *Scrutiny* vol 10 (1942), p.234.

42. Knight, p. 91.

lays down his dishonourable condition to set her brother free, Isabella savagely replies -

Then, Isabel live chaste, and brother, die:  
More than our brother is our chastity.

(Act II, Sc IV 1 183-84)

One is forced to think-are these the words of a saint ? What kind of saintliness is this that is devoid of all human sympathy and compassion ? Is she not being self-centered ? Shakespeare herein raises the question-does saintliness mean doing good only to oneself or does it also incorporate welfare of the fellow human beings ? Further, this saint who attaches such great value to her chastity, is the one to conform to the Duke's plan of the bed-trick and involve Mariana in the game of substitution. Shakespeare, through the figure of Isabella, is satirising this 'self-centered saintliness.'

Like Angelo, Isabella too, wants to be upright. As a matter of fact she, "has stifled all human love in the pursuit of sanctity"<sup>43</sup> When her brother Claudio, pleads to her to lay down her life she is deeply stung and retorts -

---

43. *ibid.* p.92.



Take my defiance,  
 Die, perish! Might but my bending down  
 Reprive thee from thy fate, it should proceed.  
 I will pray a thousand prayers for thy death;  
 No word to save thee

(Act III, Sc I, 1 141-145)

From this point begins a war within herself and one can feel the churning within her soul. She is faced with the dilemma-whether to win pardon for her brother the cheaper way or to remain chaste and let a brother die ? Confronted with this choice, Isabella realises the narrow and selfish constraints of her saintliness and thus decides to outgrow them and conform to the Duke's plan of substitution, for in doing so, she would be doing good to all the parties concerned. She has thus, found a new wisdom that saintliness does not mean doing good to oneself only, it rather means extending human sympathy to all. Is this perhaps Shakespeare's ironic judgement upon ascetics and saints?

When the Duke reveals his plan of substitution, and makes her understand that by conforming to this plan, she would do good to all, Isabella accepts it. It is for the welfare of the whole group that Isabella, accepts the plan. A careful perusal of the following extract would reveal that Isabella has begun the journey of doing good to others.

Therefore, fasten your ear on my advisings, to the love I have in doing good; a remedy presents itself. I do make myself believe that you may most uprighteously do a poor wronged lady a merited benefit; redeem your brother from the angry law; do not stain to your own gracious person; and much please the absent Duke, if peradventure he shall ever return to have hearing of this business.

(Act III, Sc I l 195-204)

and explains further

By this is your brother saved, your honour untainted, the poor Mariana advantaged, and the corrupt deputy scaled . . . what think you of it ?

The image of it gives me content already, and I trust it will grow to a most prosperous perfection.

(Act III, Sc I l 252-260)

The journey on the path of humanism has begun. She has found a new wisdom that "Chastity is hardly a sin-but neither. . . is it the whole of virtue."<sup>44</sup> Her initial reluctance may not be judicious, but is not immoral. She thus stands closer to pardon than to condemnation.

Walking on this path of humanitarianism that has recently been shown to her, Isabella for the first time feels the warmth of human relationships. Though Isabella has been much wronged by Angelo,

---

44. *Ibid.* p. 93.

yet she pleads mercy for him. Earlier she had no good words for him. As a matter of fact, while presenting her case before the Duke, she calls Angelo, "a murderer", an "adulterous thief", a "virgin violator" but later kneels and pleads mercy for this very man.

Thus perhaps one cannot condemn her for forgiving Angelo. She has felt the power of the "warm, potent, forgiving human love"<sup>45</sup> and shows "a softening sweet humanity."<sup>46</sup>

562983

She does not pardon Angelo on private grounds of mercy, but rather on grounds of Christian forgiveness. She, like the others in the play, has learnt the valuable lesson that life teaches. G. Wilson Knight notes "Isabella, like Angelo, has progressed far during the plays action: from sanctity to humanity."<sup>47</sup>

3774-10  
6327

It reminds one of the concluding pages of Goethe's Faust where the forgiving, sacrificing love of Marguerite saves the life of the erring Faust.

---

45. *ibid.* p. 93.

46. *ibid.* p. 93.

47. *ibid.* p. 93.

Claudio, who is responsible for the action of the play is yet another character giving rise to doubts and misgivings. The dilemma related to this character is--firstly, is he morally right in sharing the bed with Juliet before marriage and secondly is he not being immoral in asking his sister to surrender her virginity to win his freedom ?

The first question, how correct is he in sharing the bed of his betrothed Juliet has in fact triggered off the whole action and has called for much comments. This is taken as an act of fornication and for this, the new deputy, i.e. Angelo has imprisoned him and has sentenced him to death. Claudio explains the situation to his friend Lucio thus-

Thus stands it with me : upon a true contract  
I got possession of Julietta's bed.  
You know the lady; she is fast my wife,  
Save that we do the denunciation lack  
Of outward order. This we came not to  
Only for propagation of a dower  
Remaining in the coffer of her friends,  
From whom we thought it meet to hide our  
love

Till time had made them for us. But it chanced  
The stealth of our most mutual entertainment  
With character too gross is writ on Juliet.

Lucio. With child, perhaps ?

Cla. Unhappily, even so.

(Act I, Sc II, 1134-145 )

Though much debate has taken place on the subject, yet Claudio is pardoned for this act. Juliet

is his betrothed and his supposed wife, so a relationship with her is not held as greatly objectionable. In Elizabethan times betrothal was much more binding than a modern engagement and amounted to a half-marriage and hence intimacy of such couples was not considered as greatly objectionable. Though Angelo punishes him for the same, most of the critics pardon him. Even his sister, Isabella, who most abhors such illicit relationship, when informed by Lucio of the situation, lightly remarks-

O let him marry her !

(Act I, Sc IV, 148)

It is the second charge-namely Claudio requesting his sister to surrender her virginity to buy pardon for him which has upset critics most.

It is on this ground that Coleridge calls him "detestable" when one recalls that Isabella is a nun who has renounced the flesh and the world.

But Shakespeare does not present him as a condemned creature. Rather, he makes the kindly Provost call him, "most gentle Claudio". Shakespeare has sketched him throughout with utmost sympathy.

He thus, needs to be understood rather than condemned.

Claudio is a young man wholly and greatly in love with life. He wishes to enjoy the pleasures of life rather than put strict restraints upon himself like his sister. He wants to explore for himself the various joys life can offer a young man. He desires in right earnest to marry and raise a family. Above all, this gay young man is afraid of the very thought of chilling death. Shakespeare, through this character, is revealing what a young man unprepared for death would feel when death seems imminent reality. Claudio's values seem to contrast with his sister's cold chastity and life in a nunnery. Such a man is more likely to be afraid of the very thought of death. Claudio's character is thus a study in eschatology. Hence, very naturally, he asks his sister to agree to the dishonourable condition laid down by Angelo.

When he first hears of the horrifying condition laid down by Angelo he is furious and says-

O heavens, it cannot be !

(Act III, Sc I, 1 98)

and again-

Thou shalt not do't.

(Act III, Sc I, l 102)

But moments later, the thought of ice-cold grave and coming death numbs his passion and he says-

Ay, but to die, and go we know not where;

To lie in cold obstruction, and to rot;  
This sensible warm notion to become  
A kneaded clod; or to reside  
In thrilling region of thick-ribbed ice;  
To be imprison'd in the viewless winds  
And blown with restless violence round about  
The pendent world: or to be worse than worst  
Of those that lawless and incertain thought  
Imagine howling, - 'tis too horrible.

(Act III, Sc I, l 117-127)

These lines combine grim irony with realism - a rare thing in Shakespeare. Isabella, is ashamed to hear her brother talk like a coward and condemn him, but he pleads-

Sweet sister, let me live.  
What sin you do to save a brother's life,  
Nature dispenses with the deed so far  
That it becomes a virtue.

(Act III, Sc I, l 131-134)

Commenting on this speech, G. Wilson Knight notes :

The thought of death's eternal damnation, which is so prominent in Hamlet, recurs in Claudio's speech . . . so powerful can orthodox<sup>48</sup> eschatology be in Measure for Measure:

It is thus the thought of chilling death and the painful realization of fading into nothingness which impels him to ask his sister to conform to Angelo's horrifying condition. He thus appears sweet and innocent rather than detestable. Perhaps, he needs to be pardoned than condemned. Shakespeare seems to be challenging the reader/spectator to decide between the attitudes of brother and sister. Who is mainly in the right? It is a question posed with sardonic humour.

These are a few characters who evoke a mixed response of love and hatred, but what is one to think of Lucio? He is, as G. Wilson Knight notes, a "typical loose-minded, vulgar wit." He is not a fictitious character, rather men like him are present everywhere around us. He is thus as realistic as Angelo, Claudio, Isabella and the Duke.

He may be a realistic life-like character, but he adds a sense of uneliness to the play. It

---

48. Knight, pp. 74-75.



is his frivolous sex-chatter that strikes a note of uneasiness in the minds of the readers/audience.

Shakespeare again makes us think-are we to condemn men like Lucio ?-for they are the "product of a society that has gone too far in condemnation of human sexual desires . . . His false-because fantastic and shallow-pursuit of sex, is the result of a false, fantastic, denial of sex in his world,"<sup>49</sup> Seeing him from this angle, we can perhaps pardon Lucio, as there is no "premeditated villainy"<sup>50</sup> in him but how does one account for his behaviour with the Duke. As G. Wilson Knight notes :

"He traduces the Duke's character wholesale"<sup>51</sup>

He paints him a thorough devil. He may not be intending any harm but his uncalled for remarks pave the way for much mental discontent felt in the readers. For instance the lines where he speaks ill of the Duke. He holds the Duke responsible for the immorality in Vienna and says-

Would the Duke that is absent have done this?  
Ere he would have hanged a man for the getting  
a hundred bastards, he would have paid for  
the nursing a thousand. He had some feeling

---

49. *ibid.* pp. 89-90

50. *ibid.* p. 89.

51. *ibid.* p. 90.

of the sport; he knew the service; and that instructed him to mercy.

(Act III, Sc II, 1 112-117)

and later when the Duke disguised as a Friar asks him- of what disposition was the Duke? He says-

A very superficial, ignorant, unweighing fellow-

(Act III, Sc II, 1 136)

Such a character cannot be dismissed lightly and hence he alone gets the severest of punishment he is whipped and made to marry the woman he has gotten with a child. It is not Lucio's frivolous sex-chatter that has earned him the punishment but his slandering of the Duke, for the Duke says-

Slandering a prince deserves it.

(Act V, Sc I, 1 521)

As G. Wilson Knight notes-"Idleness, triviality, thoughtlessness receive the Duke's condemnation"<sup>52</sup>

In punishing Lucio, Wilson Knight says, the Duke is guided by the Gospels which says-

---

52. *ibid.* p. 91.

But I say unto you, that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgement.

(Matthew XIII, 36)

The only decent aspect of his character is his sincere concern for Claudio and his subsequent entreaties to Isabella to plead for her brother's pardon.

Lucio is guilty of the same sin as Claudio and therefore feels that it is no great matter. He is also like the Pharisee in the Parable, who is unable to see his own faults, but is always pointing out faults in others.

If Lucio is condemned as a "vulgar wit" what place do the pawdy characters like Mistress Overdone, Pompey and Froth have in the moral background?

Their very presence suggests immorality but we find that these characters are not punished. It is their honesty which wins for them an easy and safe pardon.

Mistress Overdone is a prostitute by profession but <sup>there</sup> is "more humanity in her charity than in Isabella's condemning her brother to death with venomous words

in order to preserve her own chastity<sup>53</sup> Again "there is more natural honesty in Pompey" the bawd, than in Angelo the ascetic;<sup>54</sup>

Froth, on the other hand, is an amiable character. Lawrence writes, "Froth is an amiable, feather-headed young gentleman - to dislike him would argue an ill nature and a small one."<sup>55</sup>

Apart from the fact that these minor characters are part of real, everyday, Jacobean London, they do more than merely anchor the action of reality. Their names are symbolic and carry an important weight of meaning.

They also echo in their actions and speech some of the chief moral concerns of the play and underline the basic ambivalence in attitudes. They are, strictly according to the Laws of the Land, sinners and worthy of condemnation. But according to the generous and liberal laws of life, they are warm, caring happy persons whose behaviour smacks of an exuberance of life-sometimes correct, some

---

53. *ibid.* p. 95.

54. *ibid.* p. 95.

55. Lawrence. p. 129.

tines not. Their being forgiven and Lucio being punished contrasts two aspects of morality-they are honest in their wickedness, Lucio speaks evil of everyone and assumes an air of moral superiority with the right to judge.

Measure for Measure is a play which deals with the moral nature of man in relation to the sexual vice. G. Wilson Knight says-

In Measure for Measure we have a careful dramatic pattern, a studied exploitation of a central theme : the moral nature of man in relation to the crudity of man's justice, especially in the matter of sexual vice.<sup>56</sup>

Man is basically moralistic. Each of us adopts certain moral standards and judges the other on the basis of his moral standards. So is the case in the play. Each is judging Claudio, Isabella is discrediting Angelo, Lucio is condemning Mistress Overdone, Pompey, Elbow and Froth who in turn judge each other. Thus all the characters are involved in some kind of a judgement or the other. But only those who are not victims of false values and refuse to judge, are the ones who are happy; of this kind are the

---

56. Knight. p. 73.

kindly Provost and the Duke. Hence both meet a happy ending. The Provost goes free and the Duke who does not cherish any false values succeeds in winning the "enslaved" and pure Isabella.

Man may seem critical of his fellows, but when placed in a similar circumstance, he may react in the same manner. Thus man does not have any right to judge. Perhaps it is this lesson which Shakespeare wants to drive home. There is nobody wholly good or completely evil-Richard III has "'th' unconquerable will", Iago is "honest" and a trusted lieutenant, even Goneril and Regan have some admirable qualities. In this light Mariana says-

"They say, best men are moulded out of faults,  
And, for the most, become much more the better  
For being a little bad.

(Act V, Sc I, l 437-439 )

Angelo is critical of Claudio for his fornication and sentences him to death for the same, but when he meets Isabella, he too is tempted. Isabella is reluctant to surrender her virginity but impels Mariana to do the same; Lucio condemns Mistress Overdone and her company but himself goes much ahead of them.

This is the postulate which Shakespeare wants us to probe. How morally correct are we in passing judgement on others and for this purpose he uses the plot of the play.

He relates the plot to the main theme and gives it an essentially ethical colouring. "The atmosphere is one of religion and critical morality".<sup>57</sup>

Measure for Measure, is thus a play dealing with man's judgement in relation to the sexual vice and the dramatist has successfully achieved his aim. Shakespeare draws our attention towards this and his achievement lies in the fact that he has left the debate open. The moral dilemmas are focussed on through each of the characters but answers are only suggested-it is for the reader/audience to analyse, probe and find his own answers on the basis of a sound psychological insight.

Measure for Measure is thus a typical problem play where moral dilemmas are only focussed, never answered, and as such the audience/readers are left unsure with "divided responses"<sup>58</sup> as defined by Schanzer.

---

57. *ibid.* p. 74.

58. Schanzer. p. 6.

If one moves beyond the Biblical and specifically Christian themes and symbols and examines the play from the more Catholic point of view, of morality, one is struck immediately by the humanism of Shakespeare in dealing with moral lapses.

In this play he concentrates upon the most extreme and reprehensible of sins — lust and fornication. On the one hand, it mirrors the Renaissance acceptance of the human body, its drives, instincts and weakness. No longer does the old medieval morality of denying the physical and starving of appetites apply. The Renaissance realised that the body was created by God, that it was good and therefore not to be repressed. The excessively unrealistic laws of Vienna lead to the breaking of human bonds by Claudio, Lucio and even Angelo.

On the other hand, Shakespeare seems to be cautioning us against too unquestioning an acceptance of humanistic values which would lead to license. License in sexual matters can be, as the play indicates, most cruel and destructive. This is symbolised at the end by the very human, and forgiving Duke offering marriage to Isabella who has tried



to shut herself away from the temptations of the flesh. There is an underlying realistic irony in this-- marriage is the reward offered to a nun ! The two poles of sexual morality are reconciled in pure human terms as a happy gesture to forgive and forget, to live and let live.

\*\*\*\*\*

\*\*\*\*\*  
\* CHAPTER - III \*  
\* \*  
\* ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL \*  
\* \*  
\*\*\*\*\*

## ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL

When F.S.Boas expounded his definition of a problem play, in his book, Shakespeare and his Predecessors (1896), he referred to All's Well That Ends Well as one of the problem plays of Shakespeare. The reason which he cited for the inclusion of All's Well that Ends Well as a problem play, was that the play dealt with such complex and intricate situations that "the issues raised preclude a completely satisfactory outcome."<sup>1</sup>

This chapter attempts to undertake a detailed analysis of the complexities of the plot and situation, the intricacies of the character and also the moral dilemmas related to them which contribute to give the play, the status of a problem play.

The complexity of the plot is due to the fact that in the present play, Shakespeare has borrowed the plot as well as the technique from medieval tales. The plot has been borrowed from the virtue tale which exalts a woman's love for her husband or a lover who treats her with contempt. As for the technique Shakespeare has made use of another medieval device, viz., the

---

1. Boas, F.S. - quotation as cited by Schanzer Earnest, "Introduction", The Problem Plays of Shakespeare (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963).p.1.

substitution of one female character for the other — a device which Lawrence refers to as the "bed-trick".<sup>2</sup>

Another reason for the complexity of the plot is cited by A.P. Rossiter when he states that in All's Well that Ends Well, Shakespeare has blended two different worlds — the fairy tale world and the practical world of everyday life, and hence the paradox and confusion. He says that in All's Well, Helena belongs to the fairy-tale world whereas Bertram belongs to the world of reality. Bertram is the perfect Renaissance soldier and adventurer, strong in his opinions and beliefs and ambitious for fame. This peculiar blend of the fantastic and the real results in a number of complications. He says:

Helena is (mainly) a fairy-tale, 'traditional' story book female, who is 'good',... The problematic element remains, because this sentimental fairy-tale 'Good one' is conjoined with a realistic, real life 'Bad' Un'; and the two particles in this mysterious, alleged unity exist in not merely different orbits, but orbits in different systems. This produces a state of mixed feelings, in which the fairy-tale solution we might like to believe in ... is in conflict with the realistic, psychological exposure — which is very much more convincing. <sup>3</sup>

- 
2. Lawrence, W.W. reference cited by Hunter, G.K. "Introduction" All's Well that Ends Well, Arden ed. (London: Methuen & Co. 1959) p. XXX
  3. Rossiter, A.P. "All's Well That Ends Well", Angel with Horns, (London & New York : Longmans 1961) p. 100.

This problem regarding the complexity of the plot is resolved by W.W.Lawrence,<sup>4</sup> through his work on the genre of the plot material. Lawrence points out that:

the plot is clearly related to folk-tale and fairy-tale, being in fact a combination of two traditional episodes (1) "the healing of the King", (2) "the fulfilment of the tasks". In folk tales of the first type a poor or despised person gains a desired end by knowing the secret of a king's illness and by curing him. In tales of the second type a person (often a wife) is set a series of apparently impossible tasks to be performed before she can live happily; against all probability she performs these tasks and claims the reward, which is then granted.<sup>5</sup>

Not only does the complex nature of the plot, leaves one dishevelled but even the themes and characters leave one baffled and "unaware of his moral bearings."<sup>6</sup>

Since "a concern with a moral problem"<sup>7</sup> leaves one baffled and illicit "divided responses"<sup>8</sup>, this chapter attempts to probe those moral issues also.

One may say that the moral problem which is most central to the play is the question regarding "the nature and grounds of true nobility."<sup>9</sup> Who should be

---

4. Lawrence, W.W. *Shakespeare's Problem Comedies* (New York, 1931).

5. Lawrence, W.W. reference cited by Hunter, G.K. "Introduction", *All's Well that Ends Well*, Arden ed. (London: Methuen & Co. 1959). p. XXX.

6. Schanzer Earnest, *"Introduction" The Problem Plays of Shakespeare*, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963) p. 6.

7. Ibid. p. 6.

8. Ibid. p. 6.

9. Bradbrook, M.C. "Virtue is the true nobility".

considered noble? Does morality allow a person of high-birth and noble descent, but, with an amoral conduct to be considered noble and virtuous, or does it allow a person of a humble origin with a virtuous and saintly character to be considered noble and great? M.C.Bradbrook in her essay, "Virtue is the True Nobility", argues that the play specifically deals with the question "wherein lies true honour and nobility?"<sup>10</sup> and the answer lies in favour of virtue.

In her essay, M.C.Bradbrook cites the arguments of two great philosophers who speak in favour of inherent virtue instead of nobility acquired through ancient riches. She quotes Aristotle as saying that nobility consisted in virtue and ancient riches, but it is virtue which has the stronger claims to nobility. (Politics, IV,VIII.9) She argues that it is "nobility native"<sup>11</sup> which is inevitably preferably to "nobility dative"<sup>12</sup>. Continuing her argument further she quotes yet another renowned poet who has spoken in favour of

---

10. Ibid. p.123.

11. Ibid. p. 126.

12. Ibid. p.126.

virtue. The poet quoted is Dante, who in his Convivio, denies civil nobility any real value. He says,

Nobility cannot be defined by riches, which in themselves are vile, or by time, because all men ultimately derive from a common stock, but only by its effects. The necessary outcome or effect of Nobility is Virtue: where virtue exists, Nobility must therefore exist as it's cause. Nobility descends upon an individual by the grace of God and is the seed of blessedness dropped by God into a rightly placed soul. 13.

Helena, like Dante's Beatrice is an example of active virtue blessed with Heaven-sent grace. Bertram on the other hand is an example of civil nobility, one acquired by ancient riches but which is not supported by honest and righteous deeds. As such his claims to nobility waver in the face of the strong glow of Helena's active virtue, receiving direct grace from Heaven. Seen in this light, the play specifically deals with the question, "wherein lies true honour and nobility?" and the answer to my mind lies in favour of virtue.

This aspect, viz — that of the grounds of true nobility is also discussed by A.P. Rossiter, who in his

---

13. Dante, Convivio, IV.XV. - cited by Bradbrook M.C. "Virtue is the true nobility," (20th Century views) p. 130.

book Angel with Horns, agrees to the view that inherent virtue is superior to nobility acquired through ancient riches. Rossiter remarks that perhaps Shakespeare had read Montaigne, who, while distinguishing between nobility and virtue concludes that though nobility is a good quality, it falls short of virtue. Rossiter quotes Montaigne as saying —

Nobilitie is a worthy, goodly quality and introduced with good reason, but in as much as it dependeth on others, and may fall to the share of my vicious and worthlesse Fellowe, it is in estimation farre short of vertue.<sup>14</sup>

The moral dilemmas associated with the play do not confine themselves to the theme of virtue and nobility, but rather stretch out to such ticklish issues like the one of class distinction determining social heirarchy, the question of virginity and that of the contrasted ways of the old and the young.

In the age of Shakespeare it was a well-founded opinion that the rich and the affluent alone could validly uphold the passport to supremacy and greatness. The poor, no matter how noble and worthy he may be, was not considered a social equal to his rich brethren.

---

14. Montaigne— cited by Rossiter A.P., "All's Well that Ends Well", Angel with Horns (London and New York : Longmans, 1961).p.98.



This was the legacy of the feudal pattern. It was this vain and stupid belief which made Bertram reject the chaste and worthy Helena.

A poor physician's daughter my wife! Disdain  
Rather corrupt me ever!

(Act II, Sc II, l 115).

But with the Renaissance came the new ideas of democracy. Shakespeare, the visionary, perceived the hollowness of such claims and through this play unfolds the story of an ordinary woman who became a worthy countess. This honour, Helena triumphs not by her good-looks and maidenly charms, but by her diligence and upright deeds. Shakespeare in doing this is heralding the modern democratic social system.

Her noble actions, win her the support of not only the ordinary people around her, but even the acclaims of "one of the greatest in the Christian World" (Act IV, Sc, IV 1-1). The King of France promises to build up a large and valuable dowry for Helena, if that is the only obstacle preventing Bertram from marrying so virtuous a maid as Helena. He says —

'Tis only title thou disdain'st in  
her, the which  
I can build up . . . . Virtue and she  
Is her own dower; honour and wealth from me.  
(Act.II, Sc III, l 116-144).

Herein lies the moral vision of a master craftsman, who could visualise a situation in which the deeds of a "Poor Physicians daughter" transcend the barriers of class distinctions and make her a noble Countess. The King says —

If she be

All that is virtuous, save what thou dislike'st—  
 A poor physician's daughter — thou dislike'st  
 of virtue for the name. But do not so.  
 From lowest place when virtuous things proceed,  
 The place is dignified by the doer's deed.  
 Where great additions swell'a and virtue none.  
 It is a dropsied honour. Hood alone  
 Is good, without a name; vileness is so:  
 The property by what it is should go,  
 Not by the title . . .

Honours thrive

When rather from our acts we them derive  
 Than our foregoers.

(Act II, Sc III, 1 121-136)

When Shakespeare began the play, perhaps he was only interested in the question of nobility and class-distinctions, but as the plot unfolded and new characters were introduced, various other baffling questions attached themselves to the central theme of the play. One such is the question of womanhood. Shakespeare saucily alludes to the question of virginity — is virginity a quality to be upheld or is it to be lost? Perhaps what Shakespeare is trying to present in this play is that virginity lost for a good purpose is better than virginity upheld. This somewhat cynical attitude seems to indicate that earlier Renaissance ideals had lost their glow in the more pragmatic and

mercenary Jacobean age. Parolles, who is a typical Jacobean carpet knight while talking to Helena on the question of virginity comments—

. . . virginity murders itself, and should be buried in highways out of all sanctified limit, as a desperate offendress against nature. Virginity breeds mites, much like a cheese; consumes itself to the very paring, and so dies with feeding his own stomach.

(Act, I, Sc I, l 135-140)

Helena, who is an upholder of virginity, in the beginning of the play, surrenders it to Bertram not to satisfy the desires of the flesh but simply to safeguard the honour of the noble Diana. Thus virginity lost for a good purpose is better than virginity upheld.

While dealing with a strange plot wherein a young man is caught in a tight corner and who subsequently tries out short-cut, dehaased ways of getting out of it, Shakespeare, in fact, is trying to present a contrast between youth and age.

In this play, Shakespeare expresses his distaste for the "unbak'd and doughy youth" (Act IV, Sc IV, l 2). Bertram is portrayed as one of those young lords who very beautifully emulate the fashions and manners of a courtier, but who lack the sincerity and genuine honour of gentility. His deeds smack of dishonour and a peevish thrill for bawdy entertainment. His rejection of

so virtuous a wife like Helena and consequent acts of debauchery, his indecent treatment of Diana at Florence and at Rossillion where his lowliness is exposed before the king, go to show his immature and unripe state of mind. In this aspect he stands in absolute contrast with his departed, noble father, who had the ability to move backwards and forwards with time. Unlike Bertram, the old Count Rossillion would not have treated with contempt a poor physician's daughter, but rather would have "bow'd his eminent top to their low ranks."

(Act I, Sc II, l 42)

The old Count Rossillion unlike Bertram, never lived only for the present. He had that noble vision of life where he could

— look far  
Into the service of time, and was  
Discipl'd of the bravest.

(Act I, Sc II, l 26)

and hence could balance his position rather than try frivolous ways of adjusting to the demands of the present.

It has been claimed by critics like Clifford Leech<sup>15</sup> that, All's Well that Ends Well deals with

---

15. Leech, Clifford, referred by Smallwood R.L. "The design of All's Well that Ends Well" (Shakespeare's Survey, Vol. 25, p.48).

Shakespeare's vision of youth and age. Leech argues that age is better than youth.

To my mind, the following speech of the King of France, in which he pays tribute to his departed friend, the Old Count Rossillion, brings about a pointed contrast between the Old and the young. He says,

----- He did look far  
Into the service of the time, and was  
Disciplined of the bravest. - -  
- - -

It much repairs me  
To talk of your good father; in his youth  
He had the wit which I can well observe  
Today in our young lords; but they may jest  
Till their own scorn return to them unnoted  
Ere they can hide their levity in honour.  
So like a courtier, contempt nor bitterness  
Were in his pride or sharpness; if they were,  
His equal had awak'd them, and his honour,  
Clock to itself, knew the true minute when  
Exception bid him speak, and at this time  
His tongue obey'd his hand. Who were below him  
He us'd as creatures of another place,  
And bow'd his eminent top to their low ranks,  
Making them proud of his humility.  
In their poor praises he humbled. Such a man  
Might be a copy to these younger times;  
which, followed well, would demonstrate them now  
But goes backward.

(Act I, Sc II l 25-45).

Commenting upon this speech A.P. Rossiter writes:

Those solemn and moving lines of tribute to his old friend are good and clear evidence that a contrast between generation is intended; between a fine old world and a new; between age

and crabbed youth."<sup>16</sup>

Continuing the argument further, Rossiter writes—

The King's reminiscences of the Rousillon senior not only 'characterize' Bertram per contra: they add to the contrasted schemes of two worlds, two types of men. One is that of courtesy, traditional virtues; the other that of Bertram and Parolles (the latter in this connection a type of vanity and empitineas, camouflaged in military dressiness)<sup>17</sup>.

Perhaps this reflects Shakespeare's nostalgic view of the nobler Elizabethan days when Renaissance ideals had not lost their power. His sad and disillusioned opinion of "modern youth" is strikingly contemporary!

In presenting such a sharp contrast between the old and the young, perhaps what Shakespeare is trying to say is that the older a person becomes the more ripe a vision of life he develops. It reminds one of the line of King Lear — "Ripeness is all". (King Lear)

- 
16. Rossiter, A.P., "All's Well that Ends Well", Angel With Horns, (London and New York: Longmans, 1961) p. 85.
17. Rossiter, A.P., "All's Well that Ends Well" Angel With Horns, (London and New York: Longmans, 1961) p. 87.

But then this does not happen in case of Helena. She acts as a bridge between the old and the young. Therefore, it occurs that perhaps what Shakespeare is trying to suggest is that — even youth can have maturity and wisdom as it happens in the case of Helena. As a matter of fact Smallwood points out that there is a, "design in All's Well that Ends Well which consists of the right relationship between youth and age... The old generation provides the background of sympathy and understanding, against which the problems and sufferings of youth can be explored and resolved."<sup>18</sup>

The moral vision is not only presented through such broad and glaring issues but rather unfolds itself in every twist and turn of the drama.

One such issue, which in fact, triggers off the action of the play is Helena's choice of Bertram as her husband and the subsequent entreaties of the king to Bertram to accept Helena as his wife. Helena had very clearly laid her condition before the king that if she succeeds in curing the king of his illness within the

---

18. Smallwood, R.L., "The design of All's Well that Ends Well" (Shakespeare's Survey, Vol. 25) p.46

stipulated time, he would get her married to the man of her choice. She says —

Then shalt thou give me with thy kingly hand  
What husband in thy power I will command:

(Act II, Sc I, 1 192-193)

Consequently when the King is cured, Helena reminds the King of his promise and before the assembled lords, she chooses Bertram as her husband. The King initially entreats Bertram to accept her as his wife, but when he rejects to accept a poor physician's daughter as his wife, the King orders him to accept her as his wife, or else his property shall be confiscated by the state. He says,

Believe not thy diadain, but presently  
Do thine own fortunes that obedient right  
which both thy duty owes and our power claims;  
Or I will throw thee from my care for ever  
Into the staggers and the careless lapse  
Of youth and ignorance;

(Act II, Sc III, 1, 159-164).

Now the question to be probed is - how far is the king morally correct in imposing upon a wife on Bertram? Does not Bertram have the liberty and freedom to choose his own wife? Does he not have the right to make such an important decision of his life, or does he have to humbly bow to the wishes of the king? Just because Helena cures the King of his malady, is it correct for the King to oblige his doctor to such an



extent so as to impose a wife upon Bertram. Perhaps no and perhaps yes.

Perhaps the king is not morally correct in imposing upon a wife on Bertram because he is a free individual and hence has the supreme right to choose his wife, but then morality also demands that one should rise above his narrow, selfish barriers and do good to the world around. Seen from this angle, perhaps the King is right in making Bertram accept Helena. Helena, like a Heaven-sent grace has cured the long-ailing King and hence Bertram should be grateful to her for her noble service and if this gratitude means marrying her, he must be ready to do it. He must learn to rise above his petty selfish interests to do good to humanity at large. What other better way then to make him realise the value of selfless love, but this. Perhaps the dramatist wants him to learn this valuable lesson of life- which he definitely learns , albeit a little late.

Furthermore, it is the fairy-tale element which justifies the king's action of imposing a wife on Bertram. In fairy-tales of the kind, occurrences such as these were regular features, and were not considered objectionable.

Another fundamental issue which wraps the entire play in an atmosphere of uneasiness is the behavioural pattern of the heroine - Helena. How far are her ways of wooing and thereby winning a husband (in the bargain) morally correct? When she chooses Bertram as a reward for curing the long-siling king, she is in fact imposing herself upon Bertram. Should she not have given Bertram time to understand her and then accept her as his life-partner? She denies any such opportunity to Bertram. On the contrary, Bertram rejects her, runs away from her and vows never to return to Rossillion till he has no wife in Roasillion. Helena refuses to lay down her arms, rather she herself moves towards Florence, (under the pretence of taking a pilgrimage to Saint Jacques), wins over Bertram by a trick and succeeds in bringing him back to his country.

These over-zealous efforts on the part of Helena lead her to question the very authenticity of her responses. Should she waste her energies over a man who treats her with contempt and disgrace? Is Helena's struggle to win her husband who refers to her as—

Here comes my clog

(Act II, Sc V, 1 - 53)

immediately after their marriage just and morally

advisable?

To answer these questions one has to study the character of Helena, for the problem is not simply a textual and structural one but rather one that demands an analysis of the character itself.

Helena is a simple, sincere and above all a woman of great humility. She is blessed with Heaven-sent grace. When the King challenges her as to how, she, a simple maid can feel so confident of curing him when the best physicians have failed, she speaks of her reliance on heavenly powers and says—

Dear Sir, to my endeavours give consent;  
of heaven, not me, make an experiment:

(Act II, Sc I, 1 152-153).

and when the King asks her further

Within what space  
Hop'st thou my cure?

She confidently replies—

The greatest Grace lending grace,  
Ere twice the horses of the sun shall bring  
Their fiery coacher his diurnal ring,  
Ere twice in muck and occidental damp  
Moist Hesperus hath quench'd her sleepy  
lamp,  
Or four and twenty times the pilot's glass  
Hath told the thievish minutes how they pass,  
What is infirm from your sound parts shall fly,  
Health shall live and sickness freely die.

(Act II, Sc I, 1 159-164)

Utter humility is stressed. She does not say that she will cure the King, rather Heaven shall lend grace through her humble self and restore the king's lost health. She is one whose "prayers", Heaven itself "delights to hear and loves to grant" and yet she is an ordinary woman or rather, "she has the best qualities of an ordinary woman developed to so high a pitch that she becomes almost a saint,"<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, she is a self-respecting woman and definitely does not want to impose herself onto Bertram. As a matter of fact, she wants to ennoble her little self in such a manner that Bertram considers her a worthy wife. She says—

Nor would I have him till I do deserve him.

(Act I, Sc III, 1 - 194).

She labours to this effect and sees to it that her heroic and noble deeds compensate for her low-origin and do not come in the way of loving a bright star—

That I should love a bright particular star  
And think to wed it, he is so above me.

(Act I, Sc I, 184-85)

---

19. Knight, G. Wilson, "Helena" (20th Century views) .  
p. 142.

With this thought in mind, she decides to go to Paris, meets the king and succeeds in curing him of his illness. Her worth established, thus, she asks the King to marry her to a man of her choice which in effect is Bertram. Here again she proposes to Bertram in most humble terms. She says --

I dare not say I take you, but I give  
Me and my service, ever whilst I live,  
Into your guiding power. This is the man.

(Act II, Sc III, 1 102-104)

but her humble proposal is rejected by the proud and scornful Bertram --

A poor physician's daughter my wife! Disdain  
Rather corrupt me ever!

(Act II, Sc III, 1 115-116)

Bertram's initial response amounts to a blunt refusal to accept Helena as his wife. But the king intervenes and makes realise the worth of a virtuous maid like Helena. He says --

Good alone  
Is good, without a name; vileness is so:  
The property by what it is should go,  
Not by the title. She is young, wise, fair;  
In these to nature she's immediate heir,  
And these breed honour; that is honour's scorn  
Which challenges itself as honour's born  
And is not like the sire. Honours thrive  
When rather from our acts we them derive  
Than our foregoers.

-- -- --

Virtue and she  
Is her own dower; honour and wealth from me.

(Act II, Sc III, 1 129-144)

but yet Bertram stub bornly refuses to accept a creature much lower than him in social standing as his life-partner. He vilely asserts —

I cannot love her and will not strive to do't.

(Act II, Sc III, 1 145)

to which Helena humbly interrupts,

That you are well restor'd, my lord, I'm glad.  
Let the rest go.

(Act II, Sc III, 1 146)

but the king refuses to accept this and orders Bertram to take Helena as his wife, lest his honour and estate shall be confiscated.

My honour's at the stake, which to defeat,  
I must produce my power. Here, take her hand,  
Proud, scornful boy, unworthy this good gift,  
That dost in vile misprision shackle up  
My love and her desert; - -  
- - -

Check thy contempt;  
Obey our will which travails in thy good;  
Believe not thy disdain, but presently  
Do thine own fortunes that obedient right  
which both thy duty owes and our power claims;  
Or I will throw thee from my care for ever  
Into the staggers and the careless lapse  
Of youth and ignorance; both my revenge and hate  
Loosing upon thee in the name of justice,  
Without all terms of pity.

(Act II, Sc III 1 149-166)

Hearing this, Bertram agrees to accept Helena as his wife, but throughout one gets the impression that Helena has in a way imposed herself upon Bertram, that

she has used regal power and authority in winning for herself a husband. Not only this, but when Bertram shuns her immediately after marriage and vows never to return to Rossillion till he has no wife in Rossillion, Helena sets off in the search for her husband (on the pretext of a pilgrimage to Saint Jacques) and succeeds in tracing out Bertram at Florence and obtaining by way of trick his ancestral ring, (as this was also one of the conditions of his return to Rossillion)—

When thou canst get the ring upon my finger—which never shall come off, and show me a child begotten of thy body that I am father to, then call me husband, but in such a "then" I write a "never".

(Act III ,Sc III, 1 56-60)

She makes extensive use of intrigues to win over Bertram and acquires from him his ring which has been passed down to him from generation to generation.

When she reaches Florence she discovers that Bertram has succeeded in winning the heart of Diana, daughter of a respectable widow, and is desirous of her.

Helena convinces the widow of her stature as the neglected wife of Count Bertram and together they chalk

out a plan by which Diana would procure the ring from Bertram and pass it on to Helena. She tells the widow —

Take this purse of gold,  
And let me buy your friendly help thus far,  
which I will over-pay, and pay again  
When I have found it. The count he woos your  
daughter,

Lays down his wanton seige before her beauty,  
Resolv'd to carry her; let her in fine consent  
As we'll direct her how'tis best to bear it.  
Now his important blood will naught deny  
That she'll demand; a ring the county wears  
That downward hath succeeded in his house  
From son to son some four or five descents

Since the first father wore it. This ring he holds  
In most rich choice; yet, in his idle fire,  
To buy his will it would not seem too dear,  
Howe'er repented after.

(Act III, Sc VII, 1 14-27)

The ring thus begotten through a trick, she plans out a much richer intrigue whereby she would substitute herself for Diana and fulfil yet another condition laid by Bertram, viz, to bear his child. She instructs the widow in the following words—

Ere she seems as won,  
Desires this ring; appoints him an encounter;  
In fine, delivers me to fill the time,  
Herself most chastely absent.

(Act III, Sc VII, 131-34)

The plan thus laid, Diana meets Bertram, succeeds in winning the ring from Bertram, and the same night when Bertram was to meet Diana, she substituted herself for Diana and succeeds in begetting a child from Bertram



and thus fulfils his second condition also.

Does this plotting and intrigue not show that Helena has from the beginning imposed herself on Bertram? Does it become a virtuous maid to win her husband with the help of plots and intrigues? Perhaps yes and perhaps no.

She is not one of those who seek a man for the satisfaction of her physical desires. She is driven by a chaste almost saintly desire to take Bertram within the "over-arching, over-ruling"<sup>20</sup> arms of her "impersonal Love"<sup>21</sup> and "labour for the object's good"<sup>22</sup> in such a manner so as to drive out whatever is impure, vile and unhealthy in Bertram. She possesses "Wisdom and constancy"

---

20. Ibid.. p.138

21. Ibid . p.138.

22. Ibid. 'p.138.

and her keen perception has perceived the evil in Bertram which is not a serious flaw but a weakness. With such noble feelings at heart, she offers her services in utter humility from the very beginning, for the betterment of Bertram even though it meant undergoing a great deal of travails. She happily bears the ordeals for only one reason that Bertram be redeemed. Such a noble intent can neither be questioned, nor can one restrict it to the narrow boundaries of intrigues or plotting. Wilson Knight writes—

"Love such as Helena's is, at its best, a great aspiration, and yet one born of humility, in her pride and humility are unified; and this is one with his reasons for both pride and humility. She has become almost a divine or poetic principle, overruling, watching, containing him, or rather it is not she, but the love overarching, overruling."<sup>23</sup>

Helena's love for Bertram is not the infatuation of ordinary mortals but rather an "impersonal love" characterized by a saintly zeal to possess, to suffer and yet work for the good of the object. Such a love interacts both at the level of physical *desire* and spirituality. Superficially, it may appear to be a

---

23 Ibid, p. 138.

purely physical, sensual love, characterised by an overpowering esoteric desire to possess and reach the final bliss as is clear from the following speech of Helena—

The' ambition in my love thus plagues itself:  
 The hind that would be mated by the lion  
 Must die for love.' 'Twas pretty, though a plague  
 To see him every hour; to sit and draw  
 His arched brows, his hawking eye, his curls,  
 In our heart's table- heart too capable  
 Of every line and trick of his sweet favour.  
 But now he's gone and my idolatrous fancy  
 Must sanctify his relics.

(Act I, Sc I, 1 88-96)

but it is at the same time a highly spiritual love that has transcended the boundaries of physical love and has reached a Divine stage. For instance the following speech of Helena stresses the all-inclusive quality of her love—

There shall your master have a thousand loves,  
 A mother, and a mistress, and a friend,  
 A phoenix, captain, and an enemy,  
 A guide, a goddess, and a sovereign,  
 A counsellor, a traitress, and a dear;  
 His humble ambition, proud humility,  
 His jarring-concord, and his discord-dulcet,  
 His faith, his sweet disaster; with a world  
 Of pretty, fond, adoptious christendoms  
 That blinking cupid goasips.

(Act I, Sc I, 1 161-170)

It reminds one of Wordsworth's love for nature as discussed in Tintern Abbey. This love initially excites the man in Wordsworth.

The sounding cataract  
 Haunted me like a passion: the tall rock,

The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood,  
 Their colours and their forms, were then to me  
 An appetite; a feeling and a love  
 That had no need of a remoter charm,  
 By thought supplied, nor any interest  
 Unborrowed from the eye.

(Tintern Abbey)

but later this very physical love leads to a much refined, spiritual, mystical love.

On reaching this stage, the third eye, which is the eye of the mind, opens up and it starts perceiving the oneness of life. It is an all-inclusive state, where all petty human boundaries disintegrate and one perceives only the good.

While with an eye made quiet by the power  
 of harmony, and the deep power of joy  
 We see into the life of things.

(Tintern Abbey)

Helena, too, has reached that stage of inclusiveness and loves Bertram from those depths. Such a love as Helena shares for Bertram is not a narrow selfish love, rather it, "is a state of inclusion, wisdom and forgiveness."<sup>24</sup>

---

24. Ibid. p. 137.

Continuing the argument Wilson Knight notes:

This love like Shakespeare's own ranging poetic vision, is universal and so a number of human categories are contained. It is not sexually limited: it is simultaneously maternal, asexual and a friendship in the Elizabethan sense, whereby friend was as strong a term as "lover," . . . . Thus love is as a "guide"; being in touch with his greater self and speaking thence, it naturally becomes a "goddess" and, in human terms, his "sovereign." Every value, sacred or secular, i.e. included, and from this height Bertram is to be counselled, advised, warned, even opposed for his failings are admitted; and so her love is, in its way, a "traitress," aligning itself with opposing forces, and yet simultaneously, and accordingly, a "dear", or thing of highest worth.<sup>25</sup>

Such a noble, selfless love is that power, that potential which sees, "that core and inmost music of his personality which no faults can disturb."<sup>26</sup> and hence Parolles or Mr. Wordy, otherwise an obnoxious presence to the rest, is welcomed and honoured by Helena. Since this love, "looks for the highest good and potential excellence;"<sup>27</sup> it also undergoes a lot of travails and sufferings which it humbly and happily endures as it is for the benefit of the "lover". G.Wilson Knight says, "such a love reminds one of Saint Paul's sense of happy bondage in servitude to Christ,"<sup>28</sup>.

---

25. Ibid, pp. 137-138

26. Ibid. p. 138

27. Ibid. p. 138

28. Ibid. p. 138.

This love speaks of that —

Perfect Love, which labours for its object's good; which seeing the 'heart', the, Hindu atman, or divine spark, knows, includes, and forgives all; and which, in Shakespeare's own experience, made him see all humanity, including all that was evil and ugly, as aspects, like Helena's understanding of Parolles, 29

Helena's love for Bertram cannot be questioned even for a second. It is like that divine love which pursues even the blackest of sinners. She is like that Hound of Heaven, which pursues the blackest of sinner and all the time hoping for a change in that sinner. She is like Christ.

G. Wilson Knight writes, "she functions within the play, almost as Christ within the Christian Scheme. They play is microcosm of that Scheme."<sup>30</sup> Just as Christ took upon his shoulders the sufferings of the entire human race (as the Crucifixion symbolises), in the same way Helena also offers her services to Bertram. She wishes to expunge the bad in him through her love which is marked by service and sacrifice.

When she learns from Bertram's letter addressed to his mother - the Countess, that she shall not return to France till he has no wife in France, she is struck

29. Ibid. p. 138.

30. Ibid. p. 143.

by a deep sense of remorse. She feels that she is responsible for chasing away Bertram from his motherland and exposing him to the dangers of the "none-sparing war." There is full recognition of her faults and in a remorseful tone comments —

Nothing in France until he has no wife!  
 Thou shalt have none, Rossillion, none in France;  
 Then hast thou all again. Poor lord, it's I  
 That chase thee from thy country, and expose  
 Those tender limbs of thine to the event  
 Of the none - sparing war? - -  
 - - - - -

No; come thou home, Rossillion,  
 Whence honour but of danger wins a sear,  
 And oft it loses all; I will be gone;  
 My being here it is that holds thee hence.  
 Shall I stay here to do't? No, no, although  
 The air of paradise did fan the house  
 And angels offic'd all. I will be gone,  
 That pitiful rumour may report my flight  
 To console thine ear. Come, night; end, day;  
 For with the dark, poor thief, I'll steal away.

(Act III, Sc II, 1 100-129).

This soliloquy expresses her maternal, Protective love for her husband. Commenting on the remorseful tone of the soliloquy, Wilson Knight says - "Here there is full recognition both of her own fault, if for once we may so call it, and also of the true greatness of her husband; for a warrior's is a great calling. From a woman's maternal view, she surveys its terror, the danger it is to be a man."<sup>31</sup>

---

31. Ibid. p. 141.

Since Helena feels guilty of driving away her husband from his motherland, she decides to do penance. As a result, she undertakes the pilgrimage to Saint Jacques. Her pilgrimage is neither a farce nor a part of intrigue. G. Wilson Knight says, "It is a religious and penitential act; she is still labouring to serve his interests."<sup>32</sup>

Various critics specially the moderns like A.P. Rossiter, have criticised the acts of Helena on grounds that she is a "traditional, story-book good female, who is 'good'; "<sup>33</sup> and hence her action, precisely the pilgrimage speaks of a dream like quality, which do not make her a real life-like character. But to my mind the argument is rather unfair. If Helena under the Pretext of a pilgrimage to Saint Jacques, goes to Florence, discovers Bertram and his beloved Diana, contrives to get the ancestral ring and even succeeds in begetting a child of Bertram, she is not guided by any ulterior motives. She is rather inspired by a "religious" love. Like Christ, she takes upon herself the task of redeeming her sinner husband. G. Wilson Knight notes:-

---

32. Ibid. p. 141.  
 33. Rossiter, p. 100.



Her love possesses, both poetic integrity and religious purity, and it is right that in its pursuit she should become a pilgrim in holy dress, going to the sanctuary of Saint Jacques be Grand and lodging 'at the Saint Francis', the whole venture being called a holy undertaking."<sup>34</sup>

She substitutes herself for Diana simply to save her husband from a serious sin and also to safeguard the honour and chastity of Diana. G. Wilson Knight writes, "as for her substituting of herself for Diana as the object of Bertram's passion, we can at least note that in doing this she is in effect saving him from a sin which she regards as serious; again she is, in fact, serving his best interests."<sup>35</sup>

When critics criticise Helena for being too much of a fairy-tale character who in the typical tradition of a fairy-tale, performs miracles, they again hit off the point.

No doubt she is a miracle-worker, but she labours to accomplish that miracle. Her miracle gets its power from her strong love for Bertram. Her love acts as a motivating power which impels her to labour and struggle for the good of the object and it is this quality of struggle which has lent an almost magical touch to her miracle. She labours to prove her

---

34. Knight, p. 143.

35. Ibid. p. 141.

miracle and hence cannot be called a contriving magician. Again Helena comes too close to the figure of Christ.

Worked out this way her miracle crosses the boundaries of the physical and assumes that "spiritualistic-understanding" <sup>36</sup> which is aided by Heaven-sent grace. At this level it comes to be associated with, "the 'third eye' of occult doctrine and practice, located on the forehead and used in spirit healing as a source of powerful rays."<sup>37</sup>

Her miracle gets its power from the deep almost spiritual love of Helena for Bertram. Knight argues, "Her determination to visit the king flowered directly from a state of strong spiritual impregnation, born of love... we are beyond science; transcendental, or occult categories have entered our field."<sup>38</sup>

The controversies, doubts and confusion regarding our moral bearings do not emanate from the character of the heroine alone, rather it is the hero and his actions that has enveloped the whole play in an aura of uneasiness.

---

36. Ibid. p. 144.

37. Ibid. p. 146

38. Ibid. pp. 145-146.

As the curtain rises up we find upon the stage the widowed Countess, Bertram, Helena and Lafew mourning the death of the Senior Count of Rossillion. Bertram utters just one sentence which expresses his grief at the death of his father and his desire to leave for Paris, where he shall live as a ward of the king and learn the ways of the Count and later sinks in the retrograde. The rest of the conversation focusses entirely upon Helena and we are made aware of her noble and virtuous character. Not for once does the dramatist attempt to throw some favourable light on Bertram (though this is a typical device of Shakespeare's if he wishes to focus any favourable light on his characters). We are at a loss as we cannot form any mental picture of the hero. By the end of the conversation we find Bertram taking leave of his mother and we hear his mother ending her admonitions to her young son thus —

'Tis an unseasoned courtier, good my lord,  
Advise him.

It is in this light that we have to study the character - as one lacking in many parts and in constant need of counselling. He is a "young cub" - youth unbridled, inexperienced and erring and hence we must be ready to forgive him as much as we can. He is as A.P. Rossiter says, "a rough diamond which will come

out right in the end."<sup>39</sup>

It is this process of the cutting of the diamond which is the subject of study and one can form the opinion that it is the diamond-sparkle which Bertram attains by the end of the play that makes him a befitting hero of the Shakespearean tragi-comedy.

Eversince his entrance into the play, in the first scene of the first act, Bertram has done nothing to arouse the sympathy of the readers/audience, but rather by his rash and insincere behaviour has incurred the dislike of all.

His contemptuous treatment of Helena at the court and his final rejection of Helena —

A poor physician's daughter my wife! Disdain  
Rather corrupt me ever!

(Act II, Sc III, 1 115)

simply illustrates that he exists at a rather superficial level and is drawn towards the shallow and ephemeral attractions of life — that there is no wisdom and constancy in the man. His pride prevents

---

39. Rossiter, p. 88

him from being sympathetic towards people belonging to classes lower to him in social heirarchy. His firmly entrenched conceits do not allow him to admire and appreciate the virtues of the poor and the humble. Hence he rejects the chaste and virtuous Helena. He refuses to accept her as his wife; it is only when the king threatens to confiscate his property and estates that he yields and agrees to accept Helena as his wife. His lame acceptance of Helena simply goes to show that he has accepted her under pressure and above all to save his estates from being confiscated.

This is simply the beginning. Bertram's vices get deeper and dirtier by the end. Immediately after his marriage to Helena, he suddenly refers to her as—

Here comes my clog.

(Act II, Sc V, l 53)

snubs her rudely and flies off to Florence, leaving his wife stranded. As though this was not enough, he sends away Helena to Rossillion and later sends a messenger to Rossillion with a letter to his mother informing her of his sudden flight to Florence and the other to Helena vowing never to return to Rossillion till he has no wife in Rossillion and that he will accept her as his wife only if she begets a child of him.

At Florence under the misleading guidance of his evil genius Parolles, Bertram sinks deep into dirt. There he makes friend with a young maid Diana and forgetting all norms of morality, desires to share her bed (though the disaster is prevented by the timely intervention of Helena). Back at Florence, when enquired by the King about his rings, his lies get deeper and dirtier. He fails to convince the King as to how the king's ring which the king had given to Helena as a reward for curing him has reached Diana, and how his ancestral ring has reached Helena. Commenting on Bertram's irresponsible behaviour at this juncture, Quiller writes :

"Confronted with Diana, he forgets all obligation of honour and seeks to protect himself by lying against her as basely as ever did any farmout in a bastardy case..." 40.

The question to be asked is - can one accept him as a hero? Does he deserve Helena's love and devotion? The answer that comes to mind is as clouded as the character himself. Perhaps Bertram is a worthy hero and deserves our sympathy and understanding. The entire structure and framework of a tragi-comedy

---

40. Couch, Arthur, Quiller, quoted by Rositter, A.P. "All's Well that Ends Well" Angel With Horns, (London and New York : Longmans, 1961), p.91.

justify the actions of a hero like Bertram.

In a tragi-comedy, often the hero is grilled in a frame and his responses are then gauged. The hero is presented as a mean-spirited, coward, freely indulging in conceits, who is grilled in a frame simply that he may realise his own flaws and out grow them. Angelo in Measure for Measure is a character drawn in the same tradition and so is Bertram in All's Well that Ends Well. His presence and actions are thus justified on grounds of the form and structure of a tragi-comedy. Commenting on this aspect Rossiter says —

The effect is to put Bertram in a frame . That is one of the characteristics of the 'Problem Plays' or tragi-comedies.

In them, 'realistic' human types are isolated like 'heroes' but in a frame which emphasizes their lack of heroic, noble, gracious or even respectable qualities. A limited understanding in us is set in conflict with ethical condemnation: and the outcome is all those various and complicated states which are the heart of the 'experiences' of the Problem plays.<sup>4</sup>

Viewed from this angle Bertram qualifies himself to be the hero of a Shakespearean Problem play or tragi-comedy.

It is not just the structure and form of the play which justifies the character of Bertram but even

---

41. Ibid. pp. 88-89.

the theme of the play with all its manifold implications that justify the actions of Bertram.

The theme of the play appears to be that the erring humanity which is relentlessly pursued by God, in the hope that it may turn to good and may be finally forgiven. Bertram is the symbol of the erring humanity and Helena that of the "Hound of Heaven" who constantly pursues Bertram with the faith and firm conviction that he would realise his wrong doings and return to the final good.

In the first few scenes Bertram is presented as a, "weak, cowardly, mean - spirited, false and ill-natured human being,"<sup>42</sup> but by the end of the play emerges as an honourable man who has discovered his shortcomings, is ready to overcome them and is even ready to accept Helena as his dear wife. He says,

If she, my liege can make me know this clearly  
I'll love her dearly, ever, ever dearly.

(Act V, Sc, III, 1 309-310)

The ignoble conduct of the hero has brought us face to face with another mind boggling question —

---

42. Ibid. p. 91.



does he deserve the tender love and unsullied devotion of Helena? Judging from a rather superficial level, one can condemn Bertram as unworthy of Helena's chaste love and devotion but once one goes to the depths, one realises that Bertram does deserve a sincere, devoted and faithful wife like Helena. He is weak and morally lacking and hence needs continual guidance. Who else can be a better counsellor, than Helena? Thus Helena voluntarily offers herself and her services to Bertram. The rough diamond ought to be chiselled to a sparkling finish and hence Helena's Holy undertaking to reform the erring Bertram. Seen from this angle, Bertram does deserve Helena.

However weak and despiceable Bertram may appear, he is a realistic character- true from the start to the finish. Shakespeare had drawn this character quite realistically with all its psychological complexities, in much the same manner as Angelo in Measure for Measure. Rossiter writes, "In Bertram Shakespeare produced something more psychologically plausible, more complicated - and disagreeable."<sup>43</sup>

---

43. Ibid., p. 88.

A study of Bertram leads us to question the presence of Parolles - the young friend of Bertram, who is held responsible for misleading Bertram. The Countess expresses her dislike of the Character in the following words —

A very tainted fellow, and full of wickedness;  
My son corrupts a well-derived nature  
With his inducement.

(Act III, Sc II, 1 87-88)

He is, "a pompous, pretentious military braggart and hanger-on of Bertram's."<sup>44</sup> He is all words and no deeds and to top it all, is the evil genius behind Bertram. As Rossiter remarks, "Prima facie he is just a uniformed windbag; but his significance is implicit in his name: because 'Paroles' is words not deeds."<sup>45</sup> Commenting on the character Rossiter writes, "He is a coward, liar, sham and traducer."<sup>46</sup> He is best described by Helena in the following words —

One that goes with him; I love him for his sake,  
And yet I know him a notorious liar,  
Think him a great way fool, solely a coward;  
Yet These fix'd evils sit so fit in him.  
That they take place when virtue's steely bones  
Looks bleak i'th' cold wind; withal, full oft we  
Cold wisdom waiting on superfluous folly. see

(Act I, Sc I, 1 97-103)

44. Ibid, p. 84

45. Ibid. p. 84.

46. Ibid. p. 84

He is one of those flatterers who attach themselves to young and pompous lords and do little good to them, rather bring them to greater harm and ruin. His identification marks are his fashionable garments (which are stripped later to expose the layer of filth underneath). He is as Lafew comments —

There can be no kernel in this light nut; the soul of this man is his clothes. Trust him not in matter of heavy consequence;

(Act II, Sc V, 1 42-44)

He has from the beginning given ill advices to Bertram (to run away to Florence after the marriage) and even in his role of a messenger between Bertram and Diana at Florence, betrays both Bertram and Diana and behaves most irresponsibly when caught in trap. He slanders Bertram when caught by the Dumaine brothers. He says —

I knew the young count to be a dangerous and lascivious boy, who is a whale to virginity and devours up all the fry it finds.

(Act, IV, Sc III, 1 211-213)

His villainy comes to the fore through the letter which he had written as a warning to Diana—

When he swears oaths, bid him drop gold, and  
After he scores he never pays the score. take it;

Half-won is match well made; match, and well make  
it;

He ne'er pays after-debts; take it before.  
And say a soldier, Dian, told thee this:

the counts a fool, I know it  
Who pays before, but not when he does owe it.  
Thine, as he vow'd to thee in thine ear,

(Act IV, Sc III, l 214-224)

The question which now arises is - how far is the presence of a traducer justified? The answer lies in the structure of the play. In a tragic-comedy of this kind, some such comic exposures are necessary. As Rossiter remarks, "Shakespeare hatched him for the plucking. He had decided to add to his source-story a comic exposure: of the coward, liar, sham and traducer."<sup>47</sup>

The stripping of Parolles which takes place in Act IV, Sc III, does not expose Parolles alone, but rather is a prelude to the exposure of Bertram. Shakespeare often runs a sub-plot parallel to the main plot which acts as an indicator on the seriousness of the main plot. The low-life as depicted in Measure for Measure and the character of Parolles in the present play act as a farcical commentary on the main-plot and characters. Rossiter notes:

Running a comic or farcical action in parallel

---

47. Ibid. p. 84.

with a serious one (which it may parody) was a symphonic device Shakespeare had mastered triumphantly by the time of 1 Henry IV, seven years back. 48

Parolles is not the only addition to the source story of Beltramo and Giletta. The King and the Countess are additions too. Shakespeare has presented his Countess as an aged aristocrat representing that group of the older generation which has abundant wisdom.

She is the one who sympathises with Helena and offers her solace when she languishes on being separated from Bertram. Through her gentle enquiries, she succeeds in making Helena confess her ardent love for Bertram. It is only when she is assured of the sincere passions of Helena for her son, Bertram, that she allows her to go to Paris and cure the King of his malady.

She is not the least proud of her noble descent and accepts Helena as her daughter-in-law. Unlike her son, the old Countess shows no dislike towards Helena, rather appreciates her virtuous and noble character. When she is informed of the supposed death of Helena she is grief-stricken.

Shakespeare presents the old Countess as a woman of impartial judgement with no signs of weakness for her erring son. Rossiter . . . remarks of the character thus—

Shakespeare's 'additions' to this simple story of impossible bargain improbably fulfilled are of many different kinds. To begin at the beginning, he invents the dowager countess; a gentle aristocrat declined into the vale of years, experienced, understanding and with the tenderest and most conspicuous sympathy for youth in love; yet with no weakness towards a son who falls short of the standards of his noble family.<sup>49</sup> A calm and moral beauty shines out from her.

The king is also one such character out of whom shines out the glow of moral beauty. He is according to A.P. Rossiter more of an 'alteration' rather than an 'addition'. He is one such character who has mellowed down the vale of life and not a victim of "haggish age" which "steals on" and "wears us out of set". It is he alone who can hear the march of

Th' insaudible and noiseless foot of time.

(Act - V, Sc III, 1 41)

Shakespeare has attached a great deal of moral weight to this character. As a matter of fact, one of

---

49. Ibid. p. 83.

the moral angles of the play unfolds through the following speech when he speaks to Bertram thus —

It much repairs me  
 To talk of your good father; in his youth  
 He had the wit which I can well observe  
 Today in our young lords; but they may jest  
 Till their own scorn return to them unnoted  
 Ere they can hide their levity in honour.  
 So like a courtier, contempt nor bitterness.  
 Were in his pride or sharpness; if they were,  
 His equal had awak'd them, and his honour,  
 Clock to itself, knew the true minute when  
 Exception bid him speak, and at this time  
 His tongue obey'd his hand. Who were below him  
 He us'd, as creatures of another place,  
 And bow'd his eminent top to their low ranks,  
 Making them proud of his humility  
 In their poor praise he humbled. Such a man  
 Might be a copy to these younger times;  
 which, followed well, would demonstrate them now  
 But goes backward.

(Act I, Sc II l 30-48)

Commenting on the character Rossiter writes:

"The King is an 'alteration' rather than 'addition'. The character and moral weight Shakespeare gives him strengthen the effects of the Countess and Lafew as types of old nobility: ... He is there to speak a mind full of reflections on honour, virtue, the values of life under the threat and march of 'Th' inaudible and noiseless foot of Time'.<sup>50</sup>

Apart from these additions and alterations, there are a few characters who are important to the

plot as they focus on the morality professed and projected in the play. One would here like to draw the attention towards Lafew and Lavatch.

Lafew as the name suggests is mad. His importance in the play lies in the fact that through his sarcastic comments, he throws a flood of light on the moral angles of the play . Further he is necessary for the unmasking of the seemers like Parolles. He is asympathetic towards Bertram and observes Bertram with uttermost sympathy and tenderneas. Talking about him Rossiter writes, "he is throughout a commentator, keeping a watchful, aemi-paternal eye on Bertram."<sup>51</sup>

Turning to Lavatch , one finds him an example of the "bawdy" elementa found in the play . His, "libidinous nature which cries out for marriage,"<sup>52</sup> may make one laugh, but is at the same time a satirical, almost a cynical comment on the lascivicious temperament of Bertram. The difference between the two lies in the fact , that while Bertram being a hypocrite, hides his desires, Lavatch speaks it all

---

51. Ibid. p. 84

52. Ibid. p. 103.



out — he is a knave. The Countess calls him, "a foul-mouthed and calumnious knave." (Act I, Sc I, l 53). His bawdy comments are in fact a commentary on the frivolousness and loose morality of the upper classes. This aspect of public life was the cause of growing uneasiness and anger in the more puritanical middle classes of Jacobean times.

Rossiter comments thus —

If the part of Lavatch, the Clown, is examined, we find... that he was intended to be a cynical commentator on the major themes of the play... he comes down to the lowest common multiple of humour, and is rather diabolically bawdy than bawdily diabolical... I think it plain that Shakespeare's intention was to provide a comic cynic whose lowness and coarseness make a glancing contact with the main substance of the drama.<sup>53</sup>

Winding up the argument one would like to comment that the moral vision is perhaps more or less clouded. It appears that perhaps Shakespeare never adopted the role of a preacher, he was a visionary who could foresee the moral entanglements that could crop up in human life and tried to focus our attention towards those dilemmas. He makes no attempts to resolve the problems. His sole purpose was to make us think.

---

53. Ibid. p. 103.

He has focused our attention towards certain puzzling problems like virtue and nobility, virginity vs womanhood, reality vs appearance and has forced one to think whether the solutions provided within the parameters of the play are correct or incorrect, plausible or not plausible.

One awkward problem focused, discussed and solved within the play is the problem of virginity — how far should a woman go to keep her self-respect and honour unsoiled. Helena substitutes herself for Diana to reach consummation and also to fulfil the vile condition laid by Bertram, viz. - to procure a child of him. This substitution which is generally referred as the "bed-trick" is perhaps the most questionable aspect of the play. Helena has won over Bertram, but by a trick. Shakespeare has not been able to artistically convince one of the moral patterns that evolve in the play.

A.P. Rossiter complains of Helena's substitution as a rather ambiguous ending to the tragi-comedy. Helena has succeeded in winning Bertram, but in the dark. She satisfies that "lust which slakes in the arms of the Prostitute."<sup>53</sup> Seen from this angle, "Bertram's

---

53. Ibid. p.101.

marriage is dark indeed. The woman is left prostituted (a thing lent for gain, not for love of man), knowing that the man can take her on debasing, defiling terms."<sup>54</sup>

Even Shakespeare who has resolved the problem does not seem convinced of the solution for he makes Helena comment after the fateful meeting with her husband in the following words —

O strange men!  
That can such sweet use make of what they hate,  
When saucy trusting of the cozen'd thoughts  
Defiles: the pitchy night; so lust doth play,  
With what it loathes for that which is away  
But more of this here-after.

(Act IV, Sc IV, 1 -21-26)

The use of the word 'lust' at this juncture suggests that Shakespeare is not convinced of the trick. Commenting on the situation, Rossiter notes:

The specificity of the reference diverts attention to that lust which slakes in the arms of a prostitute the desire for the unattainable love... and if this is what winning his true bride in darkness means, then Bertram's marriage is dark indeed. The woman is left feeling prostituted (a thing lent for gain, not for the love of the man), knowing that man can take her on debasing, defiling terms... Shakespeare's writing has overrun itself. <sup>55</sup>.

---

54. Ibid. pp. 101-102.

55. Ibid. pp.101-102

As Schanzer would put it, here we are left baffled and "unsure of our moral bearings."<sup>56</sup> T.S.Eliot in his essay, "The Metaphysical poets" states that, "When a Poet's mind is perfectly equipped for work, it is constantly amalgamating disparate experience,"<sup>57</sup> but this does not happen with Shakespeare in case of All's Well. Rossiter feels , "In All's Well there are 'disparities of experience' which fail to reach an amalgamation. The play came from an unresolved creative mind, in which sentimentality tried to balance the scepticism and deliberately not seeing far-enough (the fairy-tale-element), tried to write off the results of seeing too far through the 'realist' or tragi-comic enquiry into mankind."<sup>58</sup>

---

56. Schanzer.

57. Eliot, T.S.referred by Rossiter,A.P., "All's Well that Ends. Well", Angel With Horns (London and New York : Longmans, 1961). p.105.

58. Rossiter, p.105.

\*\*\*\*\*  
 ☆ CHAPTER - IV ☆  
 ☆ ☆ ☆  
 ☆ TROILUS AND CRESSIDA ☆  
 ☆ ☆ ☆  
 \*\*\*\*\*

TROILUS AND CRESSIDA

It is presumed that Shakespeare wrote Troilus and Cressida when he was passing through a temporary phase of gloom and despondency. Not only has this personal trauma lent the play a certain amount of ambiguity but has also compounded it with certain textual irregularities that go to make the play, puzzling and the verse peculiarly complex. On the title page of Quarto B, (Quarto B version according to Charlton Hinman's theory, represents the texts of a particular compositor), it is described as a "Famous History", but in the preface to Quarto B, it is more than once referred to as a "comedy".

The play occupies an ambiguous position in the Folio, between the histories and the tragedies and it is the only play in the Folio which is not included in the "Catalogue" (table of contents) at the beginning of the book. It used to be thought that this ambivalent position was a reflection of the editor's uncertainty about the form of the play. Later studies (after the 1950's) of the printing of the Folio have offered another explanation. This is that editors originally planned to include the play among the tragedies, right after Romeo and Juliet. However, they discovered, after setting three pages of the play in type, that

they had not secured the copy right from the publisher of the 1609 Quarto. Apparently there was some difficulty in securing copyright, so that the printing of the play was postponed and renewed at a later date, after the tragedies had been printed.

Whatever the explanation for the ambiguous position of the play, it is entirely appropriate, for it is probably best understood, not as a comedy, tragedy or history, but as a satiric play, for which Ben Johnson furnished a model in his Every Man Out of his Humour (1599). Some critics like W.W.Lawrence have detected in the harsh, bitter spirit of the play, the satiric temper. According to Lawrence, we may call Shakespeare's a version of the Troy story an experiment in the middle ground between comedy and tragedy. The middle ground was what Johnson claimed to be the proper field for his "Comical Satyre". Other critics including Boas, Claim that this play has the clearly satirical spirit of Marston's figure of the Malcontent.

Another factor which contributes to the peculiarly complex nature of the play is that it was written for a more sophisticated audience than normally gathered at the Globe. The long, closely reasoned

philosophical disquisitions and the meditative soliloquies are not the sort to hold the attention of a popular audience. Yet Shakespeare could have hardly designed the play for a court performance; its scurrility would have offended the monarch. Peter Alexander points out that the spectators are at times addressed directly and familiarly by the most scurrilous characters in most bawdy terms. In the epilogue there is mention of a possible hissing from the audience. Alexander suggests that perhaps Shakespeare wrote this play for an audience of barristers gathered at the Inns of Court.

Even A.P. Rossiter feels that the peculiar nature of the plot is due to the fact that it was written for a special audience. He writes, "We have reason to believe that Troilus and Creasida was written for a specific time and for a special audience, the time between Henry V and Julius Caesar (1599) and early 1601; the audience young intellectuals, many of them law-students from the Inns of Court"<sup>1</sup>

Whatever the reason for the complexity of the play maybe - be it personal trauma, textual

---

1. Rossiter A.P. "Troilus and Creasida", Angel With Horns (London and New York: Longmans, 1961) p. 129.



irregularity or the demands of the theatre, the fact remains, that the play is peculiarly complex and offers no satisfactory aesthetic entertainment. As a matter of fact the follies, misconduct and oddities of the characters are exposed without presenting their reforms; thereby leading towards a cynical amusement. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why the play is called a "Problem Play".

In order to define the structure of the play, one has to revert to the definition offered by Schanzer. In the "Introduction" of his book, The Problem Plays of Shakespeare, (1963), Earnest Schanzer defines problem play as one —

In which we find a concern with a moral problem, which is central to it, presented in such a manner that we are unsure of our moral bearings, so that uncertain and divided responses to it in the minds of the audience are possible or even probable. 2

It is this concern with a moral problem leaving one bedevilled that leads one to view the present play as a problem play.

---

2. Schanzer, Earnest, "Introduction", The Problem Plays of Shakespeare, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963) p.6.

Shakespeare at this stage seems to be greatly disillusioned with life. Perhaps the episode of the Dark Lady of the sonnets had rudely shattered the fragile sensibility of the poet and had forced him to look at the realities of life. This would also explain the bawdy element in the play.

In this particular play, Shakespeare probes two major factors in life — war and love. The war theme is symbolised by the legendary war that occurred between the Greeks and the Trojans with Helena as its pivot. Shakespeare seems to be questioning the very authenticity of war — is war justifiable? From this predominantly war setting emerges the love of Troilus and Cressida with Pandarus as the go-between. Shakespeare again questions the sincerity of the relationship between man and woman. Are they to relate to each other at a purely carnal level giving full expression to their sensual desires or is love something higher, more noble and a much more satisfying emotional experience? Though Shakespeare's approach to both the realities is deeply analytic, yet he has failed to reach a satisfactory conclusion and hence the peculiarly clouded atmosphere of the play.

Commenting upon the ambiguity in the play, owing to the dual themes of war and love, Traversi write:

The close relationship between the values of love and war- one of the most marked features of Troilus and Cressida - corresponds to a conception of dramatic unity which, although its antecedents can be traced respectively to the sonnets and the historical plays, was, at the time of writing, new in his work. The novelty consists in uniting in a manner mutually illuminating, a personal theme and its public, social' extension. Instead of a political conflict objectively observed and commented on by a character (such as Falstaff) who stands, in a sense, outside it, we are presented with a personal issue - the story of two lovers of opposed parties - set in the context of the Trojan War... The result, in terms of a poetic drama, is less a finished and coherent creation than a statement of emotional ambiguity, the reflection of an experience deprived of order and seeking clarification through its own expression. 3

Traversi claims that perhaps what Shakespeare is trying to suggest in this play is that there are no 'absolutes' governing life. Time, which is both a constructive and destructive agent, is the only 'absolute' known to man. He writes:

The dramatic presentation of this contradiction in the setting of a 'political' situation which in some sense reflects it, is the theme of Troilus and Cressida.

The flaw thus introduced by time into human experience is represented dramatically in the separation which overtakes the two lovers, a separation foreseen from the beginning and

---

3. Traversi, Derek, "Troilus and Cressida" An Approach to Shakespeare Vol. 2. (London: Hollis and Carter, 1969) pp. 26-27.

implicit in the logic of events."<sup>4</sup>

A.P. Rossiter agrees with Traversi and holds Time as an enemy of love. He states --

Time is love's remorseless enemy. Time is the theme of those tragic sonnets which seem to have the closest connections with some of the deepest feelings in the play." <sup>5</sup>

While Traversi and Rossiter hold time, (which acts both as a constructive and destructive agent) responsible for the much distasteful ambiguity in the play, Terence Eagleton claims that the conflict between individual will and the will of the community, is responsible for the moral confusion in the play. Shakespeare, himself, is not able to balance the scales - whether it is the assertion of the will of the individual which is more important or it is the acceptance of the will of the community which is more important, for the reality which the community may create, may not be true. For instance, Pandarus recreates a very alluring picture of Cressida for Troilus, but she turns out to be false. Furthermore, communities are subject to radical changes, and so the will of the community also changes. Eagleton writes -

---

4. Ibid. p. 27

5. Rossiter, p.145

Reality... is a common creation, and because of this it is relative: it is the shared possession of a group of men, and can change as they change. It is relative, too, because a number of different versions of reality may co-exist, each thinking itself the centre.<sup>6</sup>

Commenting upon the ambiguity in the play, he argues further that much of the confusion is due to the heavy reliance on the will of the community. He writes —

Achilles, according to Ulysses, has no existence outside the defining judgements of his society. People and things draw their meanings from their contexts, but because there are many contexts, all liable to change, there can be continual confusion about real meanings and values. <sup>7</sup>

Among the modern critics, A.P. Roasiter, has come out with a very bold criticism of the play. He views the conflict between the individual will and the will of the community from a highly philosophical angle. According to him all the leading characters in the play - Troilus, Hector, Ulysses, Achilles long for an integrity, which can be achieved only by an acceptance of the will of the community, but they are all highly individualistic characters who would naturally prefer

- 
6. Eagleton, Terence, "Troilus and Cressida," Shakespeare and Society, (London: Chatto and Windus, 1967) p.16.
7. *ibid*, p. 17

assertion of their independent individual wills. Troilus is completely disillusioned when confronted with Cressida's faithlessness not simply because she has violated the norms of an absolute order but because there is a self in him which cannot come to terms with this abominable reality. A.P. Rossiter, cites the following speech of Troilus —

This she? No; this is Diomed's Cressida  
 If beauty have a soul, this is not she;  
 If souls guide vows, if vows be sanctimonies,  
 If sanctimony be the god's delight,  
 If there be rule in unity itself,  
 This was not she. O madness of discourse,  
 That cause sets up with and against itself!  
 Bifold authority, where reason can revolt  
 Without perdition, and loss assume all reason  
 Without revolt! This is, and is not Cressid.

(Act V, Sc II, l 135-144)

and writes —

"The key is 'If there be rule in unity itself'. He is not simply saying, 'There ought to be one and only one Cressida, and she the image in my heart and mind' (though that is included in the sense). He is being made to think philosophically by Shakespeare, and his assumptions are those of Ulysses in his speech about 'Degree' in the Greek war -- council in Act I. The assumption is that the universe ought to be an integral whole, in which everything has its proper status in a divinely-ordained hierarchical order, and therefore, an absolute value, an absolute integrity. To recognise this ordered universe is right reason: its principle at the terrestrial level is Natural Law. But what Troilus has seen

appears to him as the refutation of those principles ...

If one looks at it through twentieth - century eyes, this remarkable scene is a thoroughly Existentialist creation on Shakespeare's part. Troilus represents a mind which thinks in terms of the traditional (Platonic) absolute values, confronted with an existence a phenomenon undeniably his, yet with all the sickening insolence of brute fact. For this is not 'Diomed's Cressida', the existence whose being agonises him is solely his own. As if to invite this kind of examination, Shakespeare makes it, utterly clear that for every participant in the scene there is a phenomenon called 'Cressida' 8.

The complexity of the plot has left many of the moral issues central to the plot, unanswered and vague. The moral issues that puzzles the mind of a reader and leaves him "unsure of his moral bearings"<sup>9</sup> are — firstly, are the Trojans morally right in keeping Helena with them despite the fact that keeping her has cost them a tremendous loss of wealth and human life? Secondly, is the overwhelming infatuation of Troilus for Cressida which is both "specious"<sup>10</sup> and self-deluding correct, thirdly, is the rigging of the halloo under the guidance of Ulysses right, and fourthly, is

---

8. Rossiter pp. 135-136.

9. Schanzer, p.6

10. Rossiter p.142.

the killing of the unarmed Hector not to mention the pride of Achilles which renders him incapable of any fruitful action, morally correct? The first issue is the capture and keeping of Helen by the Trojans. The Trojans cite "honour" as the reason to hold her back. The question that arises is - are the Trojans morally justified in keeping Helen on grounds of "honour"? Perhaps yes and perhaps no. Those who say yes seem to be impressed by the chivalry shown by Troilus in this regard. Those who are against the view, feel that the "honour" which the Trojans talk about, is not evenly grounded and lacks a solid foundation. As a matter of fact, it is flimsy and devoid of all reason. No wonder the battle proved so tragic for the Trojans.

Critics like Traversi, Eagleton, Terence and Roasiter have all spoken against this lop-sided deceptive Trojan stance for honour. Even Shakespeare was not convinced by the Trojans for keeping Helen with them.

A careful analysis of the debate that takes place in Act II Sc. II, in the Trojan camp reveals the shallowness of Trojan honour. Hector who is both elderly and wise argues that Helen be returned to the



Greeks as she rightly belongs to them and keeping her has cost enough lives. Troilus, who stands by honour and is of the opinion that love is the most sublime reality, argues to keep Helen and continue the war. He says --

She is a theme of honour and renown,  
A spur to valiant and magnanimous deeds,  
Whose present courage may beat down our foes,  
And fame in time to come canonize us;

(Act II, Sc II, 1 198-201)

When Helenus argues that the act is against reason and Hector claims that keeping her is against the Laws of Nature, Troilus' reply to both are significant as it shows an inherent lack of reason. He snubs Helenus' calls for reason in the following words-

You are for dreams and slumber, brother priest;  
You fur your gloves with reason.  
Here are your reasons:  
You know an enemy intends you harm;  
You know a sword employed is perilous,  
And reason flies the object of all harm.  
Who marvels, then, when Helenus beholds  
A Grecian and his sword, if he do set  
The very wings of reason to his heels  
And fly like cludden Mercury from Jove,  
Or like a star disorbid? Nay, if we talk of  
reason,  
Let's shut our gates and sleep. Manhood and  
honour  
Should have hare hearts, would they but fat  
their thoughts  
With this crammed reason. Reason and respect  
Make livers pale and lustihood deject.

(Act II, Sc II, 1 36-49)

The conversation at this juncture is picked up by Hector, who argues that Helen should be returned to the Greeks, as such is the demand of the Law of Nature.

.... Nature craves  
 All dues be rendered to their owners. Now  
 What nearer debt in all humanity  
 Than wife is to the husband? If this law  
 Of nature be corrupted through affection,  
 And that great minds, of partial indulgence  
 To their benumbed wills, resist the same,  
 There is a law in each well-ordered nation  
 To curb those raging appetites that are  
 Most disobedient and refractory.  
 If Helen then be wife to Sparta's king,  
 As it is known she is, these moral laws  
 Of nature and of nations speak aloud  
 To have her back returned.

(Act II, Sc II, 1 172-185)

To this appeal, Troilus replies harshly —

Why, there you touched the life of our design.  
 Were it not glory that we more affected  
 Than the performance of our heaving spleens,  
 I would not wish a drop of Trojan blood  
 Spent more in her defence, But, worthy Hector,  
 She is a theme of honour and renown,  
 A spur to valiant and magnanimous deeds,  
 Whose present courage may beat down our foes,  
 And fame in time to come canonize us;

(Act II, Sc II, 1 193-201)

These words should not be simply understood to be Troilus' view on honour, rather it reflects the Trojans' view of honour. The passage for all its beautiful poetry is devoid of reason.

Commenting on this impassioned rhetoric of Troilus, Traversi writes, "...the lightness and grace of this idealism covers a certain artificiality. The verba is unsubstantial and the expression vague and high flown."<sup>11</sup>

Traversi believes that Troilus' arguments lack substance, for what honour can the Trojans boast of when their prince, Paris, has abducted Helen, the wife of Menelaus king, of Sparta. Traversi writes further, "For all this 'honour' for which Troilus is ready to fight and, if need be, die, is directed to the defence of Helen, whose worth has been destroyed by the manner in which she has been stolen from Menelaus."<sup>12</sup>

Not only does Traversi, on his part, object to the Trojans' fallacy of honour, but he is of the opinion that even Shakespeare was perhaps uneasy over this fallacy and hence he has almost satirised the Trojan notion of honour. Supporting this argument he writes, "The Trojan devotion to honour Shakespeare would seem to honour Shakespeare would seem to infer, as devotion to an abstraction that has no sufficient.

11. Traversi. p.34.

12. Ibid. p. 34.

basis in reason, that is, in fact, no more than an empty justification of impulse."<sup>13</sup>

It is not simply honour that has led the Trojans to keep Helen with them and continue the war, rather, a perversion of the 'will', is, in as much, responsible for the war. This argument is rather affirmed by Traversi when he says —

The conclusion reached by 'judgement' is that affirmed by Hector — that purposeful action must follow from a dispassionate weighing of alternatives in the light of principles of reason — but the whole trend of Troilus' reply is to annihilate, or at least wilfully to confuse, the distinction between 'will' and 'judgement' themselves, to show that 'judgement' is powerless and irrelevant once the sensual will has impelled man towards action. In other words, the basis of Troilus' 'honour' is simply sensual impulse and its weakness lies largely in his unwillingness to recognise this fact, and in the abstraction and lack of content which follow in the train of evasion.<sup>14</sup>

Terence Eagleton also feels that 'will' is responsible for the war, but he perceives the whole subject from a slightly different angle. He is of the opinion, that a conflict between the will of the individual and the will of the community is responsible for the war. He feels that when individual will, which

---

13. Ibid. p. 37

14. Ibid. p. 35

does not take into account the will of the society, of which man is a part, reaches a very high level, it goes berserk, loses all contact with reality and leads to the downfall. In this play, Shakespeare too, seems to be inclining towards that will, which is supported by reason, which accepts social responsibility, not denies it. He writes —

But ultimately Shakespeare sides with reason, with social responsibility. Social responsibility may entail a damaging loss of authenticity, but it is the only way men can live logically together, for the moment. It is Diomedes' opinion of Helen not Troilus'a. which he accepts. 15

On this subject, of the conflict between the will of the individual and the will of the community, as a factor contributing to the continuance of war A.P.Rossiter also feels that a perversion of the individual will has led to all the problems. As a matter of fact he comes down very harshly on Troilus, who is the embodiment of the "will particular." Rossiter writes, "Particular will' gives the valuation of the impassioned, wilful and egoistic man who is deaf to reason - and therefore blind to Natural Law."<sup>16</sup>

---

15. Eagleton, Terence, p. 36.

16. Rossiter, p. 142.

Closely related to this subject of war, is the subject of the Fall of Troy and here again, Rossiter, finds 'will' responsible for the Fall of Troy. He writes -

Now this obfuscation by 'particular - will - and the resulting self-delusion-explains the false estimates that Troilus makes of both Helen and Cressida. He 'idealizes' both; both one 'Pearls'; but this idealization is not respectable ... the whole Trojan destruction is not women, but will. 17

Thus viewing the situation from both the angles- from the angle of honour and from the angle of will , perhaps the Trojans' were wrong in keeping Helen. But nothing has been clearly indicated.. Shakespeare has left the whole issue unresolved, suffused in a veil of ambiguity.

Lurking behind the predominantly war setting emerges the image of the two lovers - Troilus and Cressida. The question to be asked here is not whether they are right in their respective places or not but what Shakespeare wants us to analyse is - whether love is purely a sensual relationship or is it a more satisfying emotional experience.

---

17. Ibid. pp.142-143.

Their relationship is a very queer one. For all the beautiful poetry that issues from the mouths of both Troilus and Cressida, they fail to remain united. Troilus very easily agrees to hand over Cressida to the Greeks and Cressida on the other hand falls an easy victim to Diomedes' "amorous - views". So the moral dilemma is - are we to condemn the behaviour of the two lovers as responsible for their tragedy, or is there any other extraneous factor responsible for their unfortunate separation? Perhaps, it is time which has played a rueful game with them.

Commenting on this aspect, Traverai writes, "Time which brings passion to its consummation, implies equally its decline;... The action of time, which is at the same time creative and destructive, which both makes love possible and destroys it, is the unavoidable flaw at the heart of passion."<sup>18</sup>

A.P. Rossiter agrees with Traverai and writes, "Time is love's remorseless enemy"<sup>19</sup>

So much to say about their relationship and the consequent destruction wrought by time, but seen independently, the two lovers are much criticised for

18. Traverai, p.27

19. Rossiter, p.145.

their behaviour -- Troilus for his impassioned weakness and Cressida for her "wontonness". Perhaps one cannot be harsh to either of them.

Troilus is deeply in love with Cressida and hence too blind to perceive reality. Though he talks of the sublimity and refinement of love, yet he is unable to outgrow the sensual attractions. Critics agree that it is the sensuality in his character, that is responsible for his pathetic condition.

A close examination of the following speeches, will reveal the sensual lover in Troilus —

... I tell thee I am mad  
In Cressid's love. Thou answer'st she is fair,  
Fourest in the open ulcer of my heart  
Her eyes, her hair, her cheek, her gait, her  
voice;  
Handlest in thy discourse - O that her hand,  
In whose comparison all whites are ink  
Writing their own reproach, to whose soft  
seizure  
The cygnet's down is harsh, and spirit of sense  
Hard as the palm of ploughman! -  
- - - -  
When I say I love her;  
But saying thus, instead of oil and balm  
Thou lay'st in every gash that love hath given  
me  
The knife that made it.

(Act I, Sc. I 50-62)

and again the sensuality dominates in -

I am giddy. Expectation whirls me round.  
Th' imaginary relish is so sweet





It is the second speech quoted above which reveals the lack of contentment more than the first one. Commenting upon it Traversi writes -

The sensations of this passage are intense enough, but only through the palate and the senses; like the corresponding emotions of Cressida they scarcely involve any full personality of the speaker...

Yet by a strong contradiction it is precisely because fulfilment in love is sought by Troilus exclusively on the sensual level that it proves unattainable...

The ideal aspirations of Troilus remains abstract, and intangible. 22

Thus one can see that Troilus' passion fails to come to a satisfying end as it is based on that romantic sentiment which is corrupt. Perhaps what Shakespeare is trying to indicate is that, love which seeks fulfilment through the senses is deceptive and incapable of building a lasting relationship.

If Troilus' passion is lusty and full of corruption, what does one say of Cressida, who is a proverbial picture of falsehood? The charge of falsehood against Cressida, is also challenged by most critics. Commenting upon the controversial issue, Traversi

---

22. Ibid, pp.32-33.

writes, , "Cressida's falseness does not spring from a deep-seated perversity or even from a strong positive or even from a strong positive attraction for Diomedes, but from the mere process of events, from a flaw inherent in the human situation."<sup>23</sup>

We cannot hold Cressida fully and completely responsible for what has taken place. There is a certain amount of hollowness in her character that makes her act thus. She has been so conceived by the dramatist and hence a moral crusade against her, is perhaps not justified.

Commenting on the half developed personality of Cressida Traversi writes, "At most, she lives for us only in the mood of the moment, with barely a sign of that responsibility and consistency which is involved in the conception of that character... and without responsibility there can be no moral evaluation."<sup>24</sup>

Even A.P.Rossiter is of the same opinion when he remarks of the character thus, "Her passion is quite genuine (so far as that goes), so is her grief at her separation from Troilus. Only nothing is deep rooted

---

23. Ibid. p.31

24. Rossiter, p.133

in her."<sup>25</sup>

This controversial issue cannot be resolved if one simply analyses the plot. It can be best understood only if one undertakes a detailed analysis of the character of both the hero and the heroine.

Troilus is undoubtedly the romantic hero of the play, but the question that arises is does Troilus qualify himself to be called a hero in the romantic tradition - like Romeo in Romeo and Juliet or even Bassanio in The Merchant of Venice? He shares their deep rooted passion for his beloved but whereas Romeo, Antony and Bassanio, go beyond the attractions of the flesh, Troilus' passion for Cressida seems to be embedded in the mesh of fleshly desires. Further more, whereas the other heroes are certain of winning their beloved, Troilus from his very first encounter with Cressida to the last, is uncertain of winning her. Troilus is an impetuous romantic but a weak one. He lacks the perseverance of Romeo and Bassanio and hence is perhaps incapable of any sustained relationship.

He tells Pandarus -

I tell thee I am mad  
In Cressid's love

(Act I, Sc I, 1 - 50)

but is too weak to express his intense longing personally. It is because of this weakness that he needs a go - between and hence his reliance on Pandarus - a character well known for his notoriety.

Troilus is a true soldier - brave and gallant but too weak at heart. When the curtain rises Shakespeare introduces us to a young / and gallant soldier, with chivalry bursting from each and every vein, but too sick in love to fight. A careful study of the following lines shall reveal his pathetic love - torn condition. He says—

Call here my varlet: I'll unarm again.  
 Why should I war without the walls of Troy  
 That find such cruel battle here within?  
 Each Trojan that is master of his heart,  
 Let him to field - Troilus, alas, hath none.

(Act I, Sc I, 1 1-5)

Which is the 'cruel battle here within?' referred by Troilus. It is undeniably the battle raging in his own heart. Troilus has given his heart to Cressida and hence has none to fight. But strange is the behaviour of this ardent romantic lover for he cannot muster up enough courage to express his heart - felt passions to Cressida!! This weakness in his character necessitates the business of Pandarus as a go- between.

Troilus confesses his weakness to Pandarus in the following words

The Greeks are strong, and skilful to their  
 Fierce to their skill, and to their fierceness  
 strength,  
 valiant;  
 But I am weaker than a woman's tear,  
 Tamer than sleep, fonder than ignorance,  
 Less valiant than the virgin in the night,  
 And skilless as unpractised infancy.

(Act I, Sc I, 1 - 7-12)

and almost pleads with Pandarus to fix a meeting with Cressida. When Pandarus pretends to be annoyed at this and refuses to act as a go-between, Troilus broken-hearted, begs Pandarus to intervene on his behalf.

This weakness in Troilus' character suggests that perhaps he is incapable of any sustained relationship and this quality brings him close to other heroes of the problem plays, viz - Claudio, Angelo and Bertram.

Perhaps this weakness stems from that sense of uncertainty which forms the epicentre of the play. Commenting on this sense of uncertainty, Derek Traversi writes, "the play is in this as in other respects, the

product of a profound uncertainty."<sup>26</sup>

This uncertainty is not just a feature of the play, rather it is an inherent quality of the protagonist's character. He is too apprehensive of his passions reaching their climax. Take for instance, the love poetry of Troilus. His speeches, for all their surface intensity fail to make a dent in our hearts.

A close examination of the following speeches uttered at various intervals, would reveal the underlying current of uncertainty.

A poignant sense of apprehension is felt in the following lines,

I' am giddy. Expectation whirls me round.  
Th' imaginary relish is so sweet  
That it enchants my sense. What will it be  
When that the wat'ry palate tastes indeed  
Love's thrice repured nectar? - death, I fear me,  
Swooning destruction, or some joy too fine,  
Too subtle-potent, tuned too sharp in sweetness,  
For the capacity of my ruder powers.  
I fear it much, and do fear besides  
That I shall lose distinction in my joys,  
As doth a battle, when they charge on heaps.  
The enemy flying.

(Act III, Sc II, l 16-27)

---

26. Traversi, p.29.

The emphasis is on 'Th' imaginary relish' and thereby defining the apprehension much to implicitly. Traversi comments, "This impossibility dominates the poetry of Troilus himself... Troilus' passion, even before it is faced with a necessity for separation is strong only in anticipation."<sup>27</sup>

A similar sense of uncertainty and apprehension is expressed in yet another speech, when he says —

Even such a passion doth embrace my bosom;  
My heart beats thicker than a feverous pulse;  
And all my powers do their bestowing lose,  
Like vassalage at unawares encountering  
The eye of majesty.

(Act III, Sc II, 1 33-37)

and further—

Nothing but our undertakings, when we vow to  
weep seas, live in fire, eat rocks, tame tigers;  
thinking it harder for our mistress to devise  
imposition enough than for us to undergo any  
difficulty imposed. This is the monstrosity in  
love, lady - that the will is infinite and the  
execution confined; that the desire, is  
boundless and the act a slave to limit.

(Act III, Sc II, 1 72-78)

When such a deep current of uncertainty flows  
through the plot, can we then condemn Troilus on

---

27. Ibid. p.32.



grounds that he lacks moral courage to go ahead? Perhaps not.

This uncertainty is not simply an inherent quality of the character, but is also an integral feature of the play. There is a constant tension between the plot and character.

Commenting upon this constant tension between the plot and the character, which is responsible for the all pervasive ambiguity in the play, A.P. Rossiter writes, "If you consider the main plot by itself and follow it to its climax, you feel that it belongs to a play with a false bottom."<sup>28</sup>

Apart from this deep rooted sense of uncertainty that one finds in Troilus' character, another marked feature of this romantic lover, is his intense longing for a physical consummation. It is this disturbing quality that puts him apart from the herd of romantic lovers like Bassanio and Romeo and instead brings him closer to the other heroes of the problem plays - viz. Claudio, Angelo and Bertram.

---

28. Rossiter, p.131.

Consider the following lines of Troilus -

- - - death I fear me,  
Swooning destruction, or some joy too fine ,  
Too subtle-potent, tuned too sharp in sweetness,  
For the capacity of my ruder powers.  
I fear it much, and I do fear besides  
That I shall lose distinction in my joys,  
As doth a battle, when they charge on heaps  
The enemy flying .

(Act III, Sc II, l 20-27)

Do they not express an intense longing for physical consummation and a delight in the sensual pleasures?

Troilus mistakes this ecstasy for the sublimity and refinement of passions. But in reality, it is what Traversi claims to be, "the corruption of the romantic 'sentiment,'"<sup>29</sup>

Thus after a careful analysis of the various facets of his character, one comes to the conclusion, that perhaps one can only partially condemn Troilus for the moral ambiguity in the play. He and his behaviour are perhaps what the plot demanded from a hero of this kind.

While studying Troilus one cannot forget the impelling presence of his beloved, Cressida.

---

29. Traversi, p.29.

The questions, which one is forced to ask the moment one is brought face to face with this heroine, are- is she really in love with Troilus or does she pretend to love Troilus and if she is really in love with Troilus why does she act coquettish and evade a confession of her love? Lastly, is she morally right in showering her affections on Diomedes while she vows to love Troilus and above all, part with Troilus' sleeve, which he has so lovingly presented to her as a token of his love?

These questions can be answered in their entirety only if one undertakes a detailed analysis of her character.

This ravishing beauty who professes love to Troilus and is later on exchanged by the Trojans for Antenor is the most perplexing character in the play.

Troilus calls her "fair cressid" and refers to her as a "pearl" but when the curtain rises upon her in Act I, Sc. II, she gives the impression of being a light-hearted "wanton" beauty far removed from the demeanour of heroines like Juliet, Cleopatra or even Portia. She neither possesses the constancy of Juliet,

nor the courage of Cleopatra, nor the moral courage and dignity of Portia. She is as Ulysses puts it the, "Slutish spoils of opportunity / And daughters of the game."

She gives the impression of being in love with Troilus, but strangely when she does meet Troilus, with the aid of her uncle, Pandarus, instead of pouring forth her love, she rather evades a confession of her love. As a matter of fact, she reaches a selfish decision to hold back and let Troilus continue to woo her. She believes that if she confesses her love to Troilus he might consider her won, and may lose interest in her. To maintain that interest, she clings to her notion of maintaining a cool detachment and refuses to confess her love -

But more in Troilus thousand fold I see  
Than in the glass of Pandar's praise may be,.  
Yet hold I off: women are angels, wooing;  
Things won are done - joy's soul lies in the doing.  
That she beloved knows nought that knows not  
this:  
Men prize the thing ungained more than it is.  
That she was never yet that ever knew  
Love got so sweet as when desire did sue.  
Therefore this maxim out of love I teach:  
'Achievement is command; ungained, besech'.  
Then though my heart's content firm love doth  
bear,  
Nothing of that shall from mine eyes appear.

and when she finally does confess, she feels as though she has made a serious mistake, for she says -

Hard to seem won: but I was won, my lord,  
With the first glance that ever-pardon me;  
If I confess much, you will play the tyrant.  
I love you now; but not, till now, so much  
But I might master it. In faith, I lie! - -  
- - -

Why have I blabbed? Who shall be true to us,  
when we are so unsecret to ourselves?  
- - - - -

- - - Sweet, bid me hold my tongue;  
For in this rapture I shall surely speak  
The thing I shall repent.

(Act III, Sc II, 1 110-124)

This is certainly not the noble, all-bestowing love of Portia, Juliet, or Cleopatra. The lines reveal a woman, well-versed in the game of love who for her selfish gains may drive a man crazy with desire. She wants power and power comes to her by "holding off". Rossiter remarks,

The second scene introduces her - mainly with Pandarus - and it is immediately plain that Troilus's idealized queen of courtly romance is not there. She is a chatty, vulgar little piece, and in the rhyming soliloquy at the end (where she speaks what she takes from her mind), the principles of the loftily chaste heroines of armour courtois are brought down exactly to the level of Mrs Peachum's advice in The Beggar's Opera:

O Polly, you might have toy'd and kissed,  
By keeping men off, you keep them on;  
and

The wiles of men we should resist,  
 Be wooed at length but never won.

and creates the woman who uses sexual  
 attraction for power. 30

If this is Cressida's approach towards life, can we still condemn her for being insincere to Troilus and being sweet to Diomedes? Perhaps not. She is a woman, who considers life to be a game. Furthermore, she is far removed from the subtle realities of life. Perhaps it would be foolish to expect honourable love from a woman of her kind.

Perhaps it is because of this 'wantonness' in her that she allows the Greek generals to kiss her one by one, in public. It is this that has made Ulysses comment thus of her -

Fie, fie upon her!  
 There's language in her eye, her cheek, her lip,  
 Nay, her foot speaks; her wanton spirits look  
 out

At every joint and motive of her body.  
 O, these encounterers, so glib of tongue,  
 That give accosting welcome ere it comes,  
 And wide unclasp the tables of their thoughts  
 To every tickling reader! set them down  
 For sluttish spoils of opportunity  
 And daughters, of the game.

(Act IV, Sc V, 1 54-63)

Apart from this characteristic 'wantonness', Cressida suffers from a serious confusion of moral values. Talking of this facet of her character, one is incessantly reminded of two of her speeches, which she makes at two different places under two different circumstances, but which reveal the confusion in her mind. The first speech is made when she meets Troilus for the first time. She does not want to yield to him and expresses her desire to leave, remarking -

Let me go and try  
 I have a kind of self resides with you,  
 But an unkind self that itself will leave  
 To be another's fool, I would be gone.  
 Where is my wit? I know not what I speak

(Act III, Sc II, l 137-141)

She is a split-personality, one part resides with Troilus but there is another that looks for someone else. The last lines indicate a welter of confusion in which she finds herself. A similar confession can be seen later when she is with Diomedes. She gives Troilus' sleeve to Diomedes and only later realises the folly thus committed, and refuses to yield to Diomedes' lust. Diomedes, feels let down and leaves in anger refusing to be made a fool of any more. Seeing him offended, Cressida relents and promises to satisfy him, but a moment later realises her folly and laments thus-

Troilus, farewell! One eye yet looks on thee.  
 But with my heart the other eye doth see,  
 Ah, Poor our sex! This fault in us I find,  
 The error of our eye directs our mind;  
 What error leads must err - O, then conclude  
 Minds sway'd by eyes are full of turpitude.

(Act V, Sc II 1 105-110)

One notes the use of the word 'yet' in the first line. Though she has accepted the advances of Diomedes, yet longs for Troilus. The last line poignantly reveals the confusion in her mind. Perhaps, it is due to this serious confusion in her mind, that Cressida behaves strangely in the play. It is thus difficult for one to arrive at any definite statements about Cressida and her behaviour. She can best be summed up in the words of Traversi, when he notes:

It is difficult to conceive of Cressida as a fully realised being. At most, she lives, for us only in the mood of the moment, with barely a sign of that responsibility and consistency which is involved in the very conception of character. Any attempt to subject her in constancy to a moral judgement, of the kind that the medieval elaborators of this legend had in mind when they denounced her 'faithlessness', is out of place because the spirit in which Shakespeare created her made it impossible for her to be shown as really responsible for her actions; and without responsibility there can be moral evaluation. 31

Was Shakespeare taking a satirically real view of Jacobean court life in his chief characters? One tends to think so.



Alongwith the perplexing love-theme, the play offers an equally puzzling war-plot, The war arena is filled by two parties of almost equal ferocity and strength - the Trojans who fight for glory and honour and the Greeks who fight for the sake of fighting to win.

Interwoven with the war-plot is the thread of the Ulysses - Nestor scheme of presenting Ajax as the hero in the battle field. Achilles, the undoubted champion of the Greeks, languishes in the camp, makes, fun of the Greek generals and so proud of his achievements that he almost refuses to enter the arena. Ulysses and Nestor, who are old and wise, well aware of the changing faces of war and who are well versed in state craft, prop up Ajax as their hero with the intention of arousing Achilles to action. The question that arises is - are Nestor and Ulysses (more so Ulysses), morally right in using Ajax as a pawn? They know fully well that Ajax is no comparison both in wit and valour to Achilles, but still praise him high so that the increasing popularity of Ajax amongst the Greek generals, may make Achilles jealous and pull him out of his complacent pride.

If one goes by the principle - that everything is fair in love and war, then the issue can perhaps escape moral scrutiny . But if one takes it as a deliberate scheme, one's conscience is put on trial.

Seen at the superficial level, the scheme, does, some good, as it moves the bulky Ajax into action but if one weighs the repercussions of the scheme it leaves a bad taste in the mouth. What is ultimately achieved out of it ? Achilles' pride remains untamed rather his arrogance crosses all limits and he murders the unarmed Hector in a barbaric rage. As for the point of provoking Achilles to action, the scheme does little good for he is ultimately aroused by the death of his friend - Patroclus and not by the Ulysses plot. Again Shakespeare seems to be tilting at the real world of contemporary politics where so often Machiavelli was the lead and the end justified the means. Analysing the rigging of the ballot , one must consider the characters involved, viz - Nestor, Achilles, Ajax and above all Ulysses who is the master mind behind the plot.

Nestor, the grand old Greek general is one who has grown old with time, But for all his age, he displays a great deal of prolixity . When Agamemnon

asks the generals to comment on war, one notes Nestor delivering an eloquent speech, which is devoid of any worthy substance. He says —

Nestor shall apply  
 Thy latest words. In the reproof of chance  
 Lies the true proof of men. The sea being smooth,  
 How many shallow bauble - boats dare sail  
 Upon her patient breast, making their way  
 With those of nobler bulk!  
 But let the ruffian Boreas once enrage  
 The gentle Thetis, and anon behold  
 The strong-ribbed bark through liquid mountains  
 cut,  
 Bounding between the two moist elements  
 Like Perseu's horse. Where's then the saucy boat  
 Whose weak untimbered sides but even now  
 Co-rivalled greatness? Either to harbour fled,  
 Or made a toast of Neptune. Even so  
 Doth valour's show and valour's worth divide  
 In storms of fortune. For in her ray and  
 brightness  
 The herd hath more annoyance by the breeze  
 Than by the tiger; but when the splitting wind  
 Makes flexible the knees of knotted oaks  
 And flies flee under shade, why then the thing  
 of courage,  
 As roused with rage, with rage doth sympathise,  
 And with an accent tuned in self same key  
 Rechides to chiding fortune.

(Act I, Sc III, 1 31-53)

In a similar fashion, when Hector announces his challenge to the Greek generals, then again, an over excited Nestor speaks with great power.

But for all his eloquence, he is a man of little or no action. Even in the plot of rigging of the ballot in favour of Ajax, Nestor easily accepts the

views of Ulysses. Though much older than Ulysses, he does not stop to consider the moral angles related to the rigging. A.P. Rossiter takes him to be Shakespeare's "carricature in old politicians prolixity."<sup>32</sup>

The two victims of the rigging plot - Ajax and Achilles are the worst hit. Reviewing the whole scene from their respective angles one is forced to ask - how far is Ajax morally correct in condemning Achilles for his pride when he is a foolish bag of conceit himself?

The first scene of the second act, introduces him in conversation with the fool Thersites. Both try to outwit each other, but neither is successful. On the contrary they both expose their foolishness -more so, Ajax. Thersites can be dismissed as a fool but not Ajax, for the scene clearly reveals that for all his prowess and skill, Ajax is simply a block - headed hulk of foolishness.

Though greatly in love with himself and highly proud of his achievements, Ajax, is audacious enough to

---

32. Ibid. p.139.

condemn Achilles for being insolent and proud (Act III Sc II). Throughout the scene one notes him calling to Achilles names -

A paltry insolent fellow

(Act II, Sc II, l 20)

and goes to the extent of saying -

If I go to him, with my armed fist  
I'll pash him over the face

(Act II, Sc III, l 197)

and again

An a be proud with me, I'll freeze his pride  
Let me go to him.

(Act II, Sc III, l 199)

As though this was not enough, in the same scene one hears him railing at Hector's challenge. When Ulysses praises Hector for his gallantry, Ajax proudly retorts --

A whoreson dog, that shall palter with us thus!  
Would he were a Trojan!

(Act II, Sc III, l 226)

It is simply his foolish pride that makes him rail at the world. But then, perhaps one cannot penalise him according to strict moral terms -- for the

question that arises is why does he behave thus? Not simply on his own, rather this snobbishness in him is due to the flattery of Ulysses, Nestor and Agamemnon. Ulysses flatteringly asserts —

No, this thrice - worthy and right valiant lord  
Must not so stale his palm, nobly acquired  
Nor, by my will, as subjugate his merit,  
As amply tilted as Achilles is,  
By going to Achilles--

(Act II, Sc III, 1 184-188)

and again -

Thank the heavens, lord, thou art of sweet  
composure;  
Praise him that got thee, she that gave thee  
suck;  
Famed be thy tutor, and thy parts of nature  
Thrice famed beyond, beyond all erudition.  
But he that disciplined thine arms tofight, ---  
- - - I will not praise thy wisdom,  
which like a bourn, a pale, a shore confines  
Thy spacious and dilated parts. Here's Nestor,  
Instructed by the antiquary times;  
He must, he is, he cannot but be wise;  
But pardon, father Nestor, were your days  
As green as Ajax, and your brain so tempered,  
You should not have the eminence of him,  
But be as Ajax.

(Act II, Sc III, l 230-245)

After reviewing these passages can one still condemn Ajax? Perhaps not. He has been used as a pawn in the rigging plot, and thus such behaviour may be expected of him. Commenting on the swollen-headedness

of Ajax, A.P. Rossiter writes, "... Ajax, when swollen with flattery, is at once a monstrous balloon of conceit and caricature of Achilles."<sup>33</sup>

Existing side by side, is the figure of Achilles. Throughout the war, Achilles, instigated by his alumberous pride, languishes in his tent and there spends his time with Patroclus who entertains him by imitating the Greek generals. It is, because of his insolence that "degree" is "vizarded" and chaos runs throughout the Greek camp. Ulysses remarks —

The great Achilles, whom opinion crowns  
The sinews of our hand, the forehead of our host,  
"...ing his ear full of his airy fame,  
Grows dainty of his worth, and in his tent  
Lies mocking our designs. With him patrocclus,  
Upon a lazy bed, the livelong day  
Breaks scurril jests. — — —

Achie. wants, plots, orders, ... actions  
Excite ... the field, ... speech for truce,  
... success or loss, ... or is not, ...  
As stuff for these ... to make paradoxes.

(Act I, Sc III, 1 140-183)

and again adda Ulysses —

Things small as nothing, for request's sake  
only,  
He makes important; possessed he is with  
greatness  
And speaks not to himself but with a pride  
That quarrels at self breath. Imagined worth  
Holds in his blood such swollen and hot dis-  
course

That twist his mental and active parts  
Kingdomed Achilles in commotion rages  
And batters down himself. What should I say?  
He is so plaguey proud that the death-tokens of  
it  
Cry, 'No recovery'.

He is so swollen-headed that he refuses to listen to the Greek generals who appeal to him to participate in the battle.

He is aroused out of his pride only when in accordance with Ulysses' plan, the Greek generals ignore him; only when Ulysses makes Achilles see the pitfalls of his pride that he is moved a little. Ulysses says:—

Time hath, my lord a wallet at his back,  
Wherein he puts alms for oblivion  
A great - sized monster of ingratitude.  
Those scraps are good deeds past, which are devoured

As soon as they are made, forgot as soon  
As done. Perseverance, dear my lord,  
Keeps honour bright: to have done is to hang  
Quite out of fashion, like a rusty mail  
In monumental mock'ry. Take the instant way;  
For honour travels in a strait so narrow  
Where one but goes abreast, keep then the path;  
For emulation hath a thousand sons.  
Take one by one pursue. If you give way  
Or hedge aside from the direct forthright,  
Like to an entered tide they all rush by  
And leave you hindmost.

— — —  
Since things in motion sooner catch the eye  
Than what not stirs.

(Act III, Sc III, 1 145-183)

Hearing this Achilles relents a little, but to what effect? Later when he hears the news of Patroclus' death, he breaks out in a barbarous rage and murders the unarmed Hector.



Perhaps he is the only character in the play, who cannot escape the scathing attacks of critics, for he throws to the winds, all appeals of the Greek generals in a most unbecoming manner.

Critics hold his pride responsible for his abominable behaviour and for this pride critics have attached various plausible causes. While Traversi believes that Achilles' swollen-headedness is due to the "excess of blood"<sup>34</sup> leading to "extreme intemperance"<sup>35</sup>, Rossiter, feels that it is due to his 'wilful pride'<sup>36</sup>.

Whatever may be the cause of his pride, the fact remains that his pride led to his ultimate downfall. Perhaps it is because of his pride, that he stands condemned with not a word in his defence.

A study of the Greek camp is incomplete without a discussion of the Machiavellian figure of Ulysses.

34. Traversi. p.39.

35. Ibid. p. 39.

36. Rossiter, p.140.

This scheming Greek general for all his intrigues and plots displays "a glib and oily art."<sup>37</sup>

There are various dimensions to this character - Ulysses the commentator, Ulysses the preacher and above all Ulysses the statesman and each dimension has to be studied carefully before one forms an estimate of his character. When he is introduced for the first time in Act I, Sc II, one is highly impressed with his rhetorical speech . He appears to be a man of sound sense and of acute observation. In his famous "degree speech" he accurately pinpoints the maladies rampant in the Greek camp, and the audience/reader is set up in hope that he would work to cure the camp of its maladies. He strives to do so but in his special Machiavellian style - by rigging the ballot, which does more harm than good. As the play advances, one finds him deeply involved in the intrigues and towards the end, he adopts a strange role in the Troilus - Cressida relationship.

The moral charges that can be labelled against him are firstly how far is he morally right in propping up Ajax as a rival to Achilles and thereby

---

37. Ibid. p. 145.

using him as a pawn? Secondly how far can his behaviour be considered dignified in the Troilus - Cressida relationship? By the end of the play, when Troilus expresses his desire to see Cressida, Ulysses takes him to her camp and thus makes him witness Cressida's brazen flirtation with Diomedes. In a way, Ulysses, adds fuel to the fire. These moral questions surround the character and one gropes in the dark to arrive at definite conclusions.

The first charge against Ulysses - that of propping up Ajax as a rival to Achilles leaves one in a moral dilemma . Are we to condemn Ulysses on moral grounds for rigging the ballot? The answer ought to be as crafty as the situation. To answer this question one has to ask another very pertinent question - was there any other way of rousing Achilles? A veryhypothetical question to answer, but nevertheless, good to be attempted. Perhaps there was no other way of rousing Achilles.

But then the question that arises is - is this device morally correct? One is forced to ask oneself is this device by the same Ulysses who talks about 'the speciality of rule'? (Act 1, Sc II, 1 -74). Does this scheme not amount to "degree" being "vizarded".

Ulysses who talks of "degree" and "honour" is the first to shed it.

Seeing the character from this angle one is reminded of the views of Rossiter, "Ulysses is disingenuous; . . . He has turned his back on all absolute values implicit in his "Degree" oration."<sup>38</sup>

Thus we see that the whole issue leaves one "unsure of our bearings so that uncertain or divided responses to it in the minds of the audience are possible or even probable."<sup>39</sup>

It is not just that the rigging of the ballot has eclipsed the prestige of Ulysses, rather his behaviour in the Troilus- Cressida relationship also forces one to analyse the values (if any) cherished by this man. In Act IV, Sc V , when Troilus expresses his desire to be led to Calchas' tent so that he may be able to see Cressida, Ulysses shrewdly informs him of the growing intimacy between Cressida and Diomedes.

38. Ibid. p. 145

39. Schanzer.p.6

A close examination of the conversation will reveal the mean spirit flourishing under the garb of refined wisdom.

Troilus            My Lord Ulysses, tell me, I beseech you,  
                     In what place of the field doth calchas keep?  
 Ulysses          At Meneleus' tent, most princely Troilus  
                     There Diomed doth feast with him to night;  
                     Who neither looks upon the heaven or earth  
                     But gives all gaze and bent of amorous view  
                     On the fair Cressid

(Act IV, Sc V, 1 276-282)

This extract reveals that for all his wisdom, refinement <sup>and</sup> rhetoric Ulysses is a base, mean-spirited man.

Further in Act V, Sc II, when Troilus reaches the camp of Calchas and witnesses the false behaviour of his beloved, Cressida, Ulysses plays a strange role. Though he repeatedly asks Troilus to move out, yet in a strange manner eggs him on to witness the scene in all its ugliness. Can one still forgive Ulysses? Perhaps not. He has neither displayed any honourable, dignified values in war nor so in love. He is essentially a shrewd politician, whose practicality is devoid of all "honour" and "degree" that it may lay claims to.

His brutally realistic approach to the ugly facts of life makes him kin to Lucio in Measure for Measure - and his speeches ring with the same sardonic humour.

If this be the character of one of the great generals what does one say of the minor characters? Can one condemn Diomedes for desiring Cressida? Perhaps not, for if one condemns him what does one say of Paris, who is living happily with Helen, wife of Menelaus, the king of Sparta? Diomedes may be a gallant soldier in the field but in his private life he behaves in an unchivalrous fashion. His behaviour towards Cressida makes it evidently clear that for him love is simply an animal-lust.

Thus one sees that the entire Greek camp comprises of characters, who are victims of their pride and eccentricities and thus bring down the world upon themselves.

If this be the condition of the "fierce" Greeks, what is the condition of the Trojans? The Trojan arena is overshadowed by the towering presence of Hector.

He is the only one amongst the Trojans who

appeals for the return of Helen to Menelaus. His appeal is based on a moral principle. He says —

nature craves  
 All dues he rendered to their owners. Now  
 What nearer debt in all humanity  
 Than wife is to the husband? If this law  
 Of nature be corrupted through affection,  
 And that great minds, of partial indulgence  
 To their benumbed wills, resist the same,  
 There is a law in each well-ordered nation  
 To curb those raging appetites that are  
 Most obedient and refractory.  
 If Helen then be wife to Sparta's king.  
 As it is known she is, these moral laws  
 Of nature and of nations speak aloud  
 To have her back returned.

(Act II, Sc II, 1 172-182)

Honour and morality demands that she be returned to the Greeks, but a moment later,

the general who was talking so vehemently about honour, switches to the side of Troilus and decides to keep Helen. This sudden shift of Hector from reason to emotion is the most perplexing and inexplicable quality of his character. It can be explained only on one ground that perhaps it corresponds to the mood of uncertainty flowing through the play.

He is the only soldier who displays chivalry. His challenge and his honourable behaviour with Ajax all speak of a true soldier's spirit. Further his

values are revealed in the fact that he refuses to attack an 'unarmed' enemy. But tragically enough, he is the one who is slaughtered when unarmed.

He is the only one perhaps whose morals are not put to the test except for one instance when he sides with Troilus' impassioned will. Again the issue is left vague.

Can a discussion of characters be complete without a word on Pandarus and Thersites?

Pandarus plays the role of a typical bawd. We should not expect any morality, honour decency, sincerity from such persons. Perhaps it is for this reason that one need not put them to any moral scrutiny. Time itself settles accounts with them. Hence we find a diseased, leprous Pandarus pulling down the curtain but his words ring with bitter truth.

Thersites is the cynical commentator. He rails at everyone right from Agamemnon down to the fool Patroclus. Nevertheless his cynical remarks carry a grain of truth and hence cannot be dismissed as an insignificant crow croaking at the events rather like Lucio. His extreme spitefulness leaves a bad



taste in the mouth and hence he stands condemned - as does Lucio.

Rossiter feels that he is the one, "who defiles everything"<sup>40</sup> by his presence. Thersites is in the words of Rossiter, "unmistakably the Jacobean malcontent; the self advertising moral critic whose avid curiosity about life brings him only a raging misery at its meanness and meaninglessness, and a self-tormented rage which spits itself out in the railing, contempt and abuse (the filthier the better)<sup>41</sup>."

Thus one sees that the characters from the most important to the most insignificant are covered by a veil of ambiguity . Each of them suffers from a deformity and hence pull down their misfortune upon themselves.

Throughout the play, one finds the ugly atmosphere of double standards. People profess noble values, but the moment, the values are put to test,

---

40. Rossiter. p.149

41. Ibid. p. 149

they act most ignobly. Ulysses, talks of "degree" and "honour" but he is the one to shed it in his Machiavellian tactics. Hector holds "Particular will" defective and favours the will of the community, yet sides with Troilus and fans the "particular will" which he had criticised and condemned . Troilus speaks of "honour" but refuses to give Helen back to the Greeks. Ajax condemns Achilles for pride, but he himself is full of conceit. Achilles is condemned for pride but each Greek general is proud in his own way.

Critics are perplexed about the peculiar form and meaning of the play. Various critics have attached different labels to it. Rossiter in his book Angel with Horns puts forward the remarks of various critics. He quotes Dowden for calling the play "a comedy of disillusion," Ridley for calling it a "Wry-mouthed comedy" Ulrici, Boas and O.J.Campbell for calling it a "satire", Dover Wilson and G.B.Harrison for calling it a "piece of "propaganda" a "morality", and a "problem play" while he himself considers it to be an "Inquisition".

One may also say that the play appears to be Shakespeare's probe into appearance and reality and it is this peculiar quality that brings it close to

Measure for Measure and All's Well that Ends Well.

Shakespeare in all these plays seems to be asking, is the world the same in reality as it appears? This particular play makes a more bitter enquiry in this direction. In it, all values related to war and love are put to the test and one notes that all values when put to trial crumble like a house of cards. Life does not seem to be governed by absolutes — moral, ethical or religious. Perhaps what Shakespeare is trying to suggest is that it is the mood of the moment that decides action.

The play in this respect bears resemblance to the other Jacobean plays, where there is a deep questioning of values. Rossiter writes, "I can see this as nothing but a Jacobean play, concerned with the questioning of values in the world of Spenser and Petrarchan sonneteers: a world in which the perplexities (rather than the triumphs) of Renaissance individualism occupy the attention; where the dismissing of the old stable Medieval universals leaves thoughtful minds with the distressing discovery that if every individual thinks freely for himself and follows his own will, then chaos results, in which order is lost."<sup>42</sup>

---

As one attempts an assessment of Troilus and Cressida several unresolved questions arise. As one ponders the twin themes which form the main issues of the play one is reminded of Shaw , dealing with self same matters in Arms and the Man, presenting his arguments with greater force and directness and certainly indicating some answers . But here the greater genius of Shakespeare is reflected. His treatment of love swings between the two poles of mere physical desire and its fulfilment and the more emotional and imaginative passion. Pandarus the cynic, who parallels Bernadine and Lucio in Measure for Measure and Parolles in All's Well that Ends Well, makes the concluding comment that it is men like him, the pimps, whom the world will always need and therefore value. They are the survivors , on the other hand there are several speeches of the same temper as

As true thou tell'st me when I say I love her;  
 But, saying thus, instead of oil and halm,  
 Thou lay'st in every gash that love hath given  
 me  
 The knife that made it.

(Act I, Sc I, l 59-62)

Similarly war is seen in its twin aspects - those who fight to win, no matter how, and those who fight for glory, national honour and manly pride, Shakespeare portrays each notion with impartial care and feeling . In all this where does one find the

author's own position - if he has one? The issue is left unresolved in both cases and fulfils Shanzer's basic dictum that a problem play presents moral issues and ethical complications in such a vague and uncertain fashion that the reader/spectator is left in an uneasy state of mind, often the protagonists themselves are confused eg. Ulysses makes a brave speech about the vital necessity of order and its divine organisation and yet disturbs that very order by substituting Ajax for Achilles.

Another sphere where matters are not very clear is the subject of dramatic form. Is this play a tragedy? There is suffering, disillusionment and even death, there is plenty of sombre imagery and atmosphere which suits with a tragedy - but there is hardly any tragic emotion at the close. Nor can this play be called a comedy, excepting for the black humour of Pandarus and the humblings of Ajax. One is tempted to conclude that perhaps Shakespeare chose to attempt a new form - a satirical play. From reading the corpus of his works one notes that he boldly broke with earlier traditions of comedy and tragedy and was condemned for writing a "mongrel sort of tragi-comedy". Therefore it is not inconceivable that he chose to break from restrictions of form to attempt satire.

This experimental approach accounts for the vagueness of form and also partially explains the peculiarly twisted syntax and complexity of verse in the play.

One again notes that this play is more cerebral in tone, for there is much talk and little action. Ulysses, Nestor, Achilles, Pandarus, Hector - all of them make elaborate speeches which produce little action, or action, which is disproportionate to the power of the spoken word. Perhaps Shakespeare was using this as a satirical device to poke fun at the statesmen and military leaders, of the Jacobean Age who deliberated great affairs of European warfare and American colonisation, but the fruits of their words and writings was poor.

When one analyses the characters with a view to understanding them, Terence Eagleton points out that the will of the community is shown in opposition to the will of the individual - Ulysses and the Greeks decide the future action of Achilles depending upon their understanding of their hero. Cressida is tossed from one side to the other for greater benefits to both the Trojans and the Greeks. The personal attitudes and opinions of the personages involved are of secondary importance. As Eagleton suggests, the community gives

value to its individual members and the individuals seek fulfilment according to the value which society gives to each. In this context again, Shakespeare does not make his position clear. If one looks at it through the eyes of Tillyard, then Shakespeare is undecided about social patterns and norms, but if one reads Shakespeare, with the aid of Eagleton, then he is almost a modern Marxist, or at least a Benthamite.

Because the stance of Shakespeare is confused or ambiguous on so many issues this can truly be labelled a "Problem Play". Not merely because problem of ethics, social responsibility and other intellectual questions are central to the play, but also because Shakespeare keeps his chief characters as puzzled as the readers. One finds it impossible to probe and discover the stance of the creator. This is undoubtedly a tribute to the genius and sensibility of Shakespeare for he understood that in the world there are few certainties and definites, there are seldom any absolutes or fixturs - life is rather a magical mist which sometimes lifts to expose the concrete and at other time wraps facts in uncertainties and probabilities.

\*\*\*\*\*  
\*  
\* CHAPTER - V \*  
\*  
\* CONSLUSION \*  
\*  
\*\*\*\*\*



## C O N C L U S I O N

As one attempts to put together the various strands of thoughts and arguments focused upon in each of the preceding chapters one finds oneself caught between two very different and opposing standpoints. Firstly, one is tempted to conclude that perhaps Shakespeare has no very clear moral message, no easily recognisable religious or spiritual stand. Here one is strongly reminded of the clearly moral universe projected in the great tragedies.

If existence in an order depends on good and the presence of evil is hostile to such existence; the inner being or soul of this order must be akin to good. 1

and of the distinctly Christian world of forgiveness and reconciliation presented in the last romances.

Throughout this tumult of creative activity, turning every grief to a star, making of his very loathing something rich and strange... a centre of love and faith must be presumed. 2

or, secondly may be these plays are the closest that Shakespeare comes to writing cynical, satirical drama reflecting the real values (or their absence) in the actual world of James I. The growing Puritan,

1. Bradley, A. C., Shakespearean Tragedy, (London: Macmillan and Co. 1905) p. 21.
2. Knight, G. Wilson, "The Shakespearean Superman," Casebook on The Tempest, (ed), Palmer, D. J., (Glasgow: Macmillan,

influence had coloured the thinking of many of Shakespeare's Jacobean contemporaries and Bussy D'Ambois, 1604 by Chapman, The Honest Whore, (1604) by Dekker and The Malcontent (1604) by Marston bear witness to the new satirical kind of drama.

It is interesting to note that at the same time Shakespeare had not finished interesting himself with serious moral and metaphysical considerations in his tragedies. In these he is far from ambiguous in his attitudes towards morality. On the contrary these problem plays abound in unresolved statements and half stated truisms which leave the reader baffled and disturbed.

When one puts these plays into their proper chronological order and in the perspective of time, one cannot but help noting their distinctive Jacobean flavour as opposed to the early effervescence and liveliness of the plays of the 1590's. A more sombre note came into social life with the coming of the Stuarts. Besides the influence of court personalities there was the inevitable disillusionment which follows any outpouring of the human spirit as seen in Jacobean life. The glory and freshness of the Renaissance dream, the promise and adventure, the enthusiasm and

bold acceptance of humanistic values had given place to disillusionment and cynicism. Now it is the facts of life, examined by middle-class minds which comes to the fore. The hopes that humanism kindled had faded and the new generation of writers looked at the facts of life rather than its hopes and dreams — Marston, Chapman and Johnson. And one cannot help wondering whether the same mental change did not affect Shakespeare.

While reading Measure for Measure the decision of the Duke to leave the ruling of Vienna in the hands of a more able Angelo brings to mind the ways of James I, who was certainly inept ruler as compared to his predecessors. Questions of public morality such as the condemnation of Claudio, Bernadine and Lucio were just the kind of dilemmas which would attract the attention of the Puritan middle class. Many of Angelo's tirades against immorality in social life would have been heartily applauded by contemporary audience. Yet in the final analysis one is left only half satisfied by the settlements in the Fifth act. Angelo and Claudio are guilty of the same offence and yet their sentences are so different. The Duke offers to marry Isabella, but we are not sure whether she accepts him. Shakespeare seems clearly reluctant to make any value judgement, but merely shows that a kind of order and stability is

restored to Vienna. The spectators having witnessed the weakness of the Duke are not to be blamed for wondering how long before the Duke's moral frailties will make him leave Vienna again. Is Isabella to be rewarded for her noble self-sacrifice and courage with marriage? To reward a man with marriage for adhering to her vows is surely ironic indeed. The moral dilemma of Justice as against Mercy remains at the centre of action in this play - and remains unresolved. Shakespeare seems to incline towards Mercy and seems to shy away from seeing the world as purely black or white. Mariana states --

They say best men are moulded out of faults,  
And, for the most, become much more the better  
For being a little bad.

(M. for M. Act V, Sc I, 1 437-439)

and Angelo even in the height of his power says-

Thieves for their robbery have authority  
When judges steal themselves

(M. for M. Act II, Sc II, 1 175-176)

There is no surety in Mercy as is shown at the close of The Merchant of Venice where justice is done on Shylock and Mercy shown to Antonio. The audience were sure of their values and satisfied with the close! Here one is left half - convinced and unsatisfied as the moral issue is not decisively resolved.

In All's Well that Ends Well, again the moral crisis which prompts the action is somewhat nuclear. Unless one takes the entire play to the plane of Christian symbolism with Helena as an all forgiving, saving Christ perceiving a sinful, wilful and proud Man (who is represented by Bertram) -- one cannot be satisfied with the action as it stands. As in Measure for Measure it would appear that virtue triumphs and is rewarded and that ultimately normalcy and order are restored. But can one accept that a cowardly, selfish Bertram is a fitting reward for the constancy of Helena? Is not one uncomfortable at the yoking together of two such persons who are poles apart in understanding of life and nobility of character? In the earlier comedies one is always intellectually and emotionally satisfied that lovers are rightfully united - but this cannot be said of All's Well that Ends Well.

Allied to the above is the very contemporary issue of class and nobility of birth. Bertram scorns to couple himself with "physician's daughter". Helena herself is aware of the disparity in their social status, yet both the king and Countess overlook this and find her worthy to become Countess Rossillion. The Elizabethans laid great emphasis upon degree, and yet

commoners like Drake and Raleigh were elevated to the highest rank. Robert Carr, a page at James I court rises to become Earl of Somerset and the notorious George Villiers was made Duke of Buckingham. These promotions appear to support Helena's case, but opposition from Church and aristocracy was great. One asks whether Shakespeare is being a true democrat and supporting claims of virtue and nobility of mind against claims of birth and blood.

The spacious manor homes which the Elizabethans built for themselves reflected alike their prosperity and their superb taste; and the solidity of these houses bore witness that the men who built them knew that the future was on their side. 3

But though the windbag Barollee is undone, one remains dissatisfied. Shakespeare seems to be also exposing these social upheavals, but not taking any sides. His moral banning and spiritual beliefs remain as shrouded in this play as in Measure for Measure.

The "bed - trick" which features in both the plays seem to be more of an easy solution to a situation which is difficult. It smacks of too easy an answer which enables both Isabella and Helena to retain their virtue and at the same time by trickery to have

---

3. Reese, M.M. The Tudors and Stuarts (London: Edward Arnold & Co. 1940).p.170.

their cake and eat it too. This clouds moral standards considerably.

This ambiguity in moral outlook is once again in the third play chosen for study, Troilus and Cressida. Here the twin themes of love and war pose problems. It is interesting to note that three centuries later G.B.Shaw chose those very same issues for analysis in his play Arms and the Man (1895) but unlike his predecessor Shaw displays no ambiguity and is very clear as to which opinion he supports. Shakespeare presents the ugly, seamy side of both love and war and at the same time contrasts it with a picture of their nobility and honourable estate. Hector opposes Ulysses' and Troilus' stands against Pandarus. Hector refuses to strike an unarmed foe but is himself killed by a trick. Ulysses makes a brave speech in favour of "degree" and yet in action goes against his own principle. Troilus is full of romantic passion of love.

I tell thee I am mad  
In Cressid's love:

(Troilus and Cressida, Act I, Sc I, 1 )

and Pandarus is the cynical realist and  
Thersites remarks :-

Lechery, lechery; still wars and lechery; nothing  
else holds fashion: a burning devil take them!

(Trio & Cress. Act V, Sc III, 11 196-197)

At the close of the play love does not triumph and the military conflict is left unresolved . There is no hint of the Trojan Horse and the ultimate Grecian victory. Given these facts one cannot but conclude that Shakespeare seems to shy away from absolutes and keeps his options open. On the other hand the characters and their emotions are more akin to every day life than say, the deeds and speeches of a Lear or Othello. One may reason perhaps Shakespeare is fully displaying his famous "negative capability" and allowing the reader/spectator to resolve the answers for himself. Like an adroit lawyer or counsellor he marshals the facts and refuses to influence or advocate any decision.

His method was not to point a moral; it was to enrich our sympathies, to stimulate our moral nature, and then, as one dealing with mature minds, to invite our independent judgement. <sup>4</sup>

In stimulating our moral nature Shakespeare remains close to life, without stirring up those grander passions which he takes up for treatment in the great tragedies. He does not strictly demarcate good from evil, right from wrong and virtue from vice.

---

4. House, Earnest Marshall, Spiritual Values in Shakespeare , (New York : Abingdon Press, 1955), p. 140.



Angelo, Bertram, Cressida, Ulysses, are all a mixture of contraries and that is closer to the truth of life than supermen of magnificent and heroic proportions.

One notes as does House, that Shakespeare aims at awakening our moral nature' and this is a positive principle. He is aware of the existence of morality and of the necessity of arousing it. One notes that each play closes with law, order and decency restored, granted that it is restored at a great price.

These plays stand, as has earlier been noted, as a stepping stone for the world of passionate tragedy to the calm restoration of the Romances and we note that the theme of reconciliation and forgiveness begins to be discovered here for the first time. Of course it is worked with greater detail and with stronger emphasis later till Shakespeare comes to state in The Tempest.

Though with their high wrongs I am struck to the quick  
Yet with my nobler reason 'gainst my fury  
Do I take part; the rarer action is  
In virtue than in vengeance they being penitent,  
The sole drift of my purpose doth extend  
Not a frown further.

(Tempest, Act V, Sc. I. 1 27-32)

One may cite the forgiveness meted out to Angelo and Bertram. Even Pandarus is allowed to continue his

distasteful trade in the interests of the common mankind. But this theme is, as Schanzer remarks clouded and uncertain in the problem plays -- and more clearly shown in the Romances.

In drawing a final conclusion one must stand with Schanzer. Shakespeare was too great an artist to present a nihilistic or negative vision as one finds in some twentieth century drama, but he seems to be over careful in not revealing his hand in the Problem Plays. The morality is there, but confused. He is being true to life and not painting his men and women in simple black or white and the final tone is what House points out --

He sends us out from the plays feeling not helpless, but rather awed, pitiful and reverent and knowing that the issues of life are in the heart. 5

---

5. House, Ernest Marshall, Spiritual Values in Shakespeare, (New York : Abingdon Press, 1955)  
 - 166

\*\*\*\*\*  
\*  
\*  
\* BIBLIOGRAPHY \*  
\*  
\*\*\*\*\*

A BRIEF ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

PRIMARY SOURCES:

- Alexander, Peter (ed)                      The Complete Works of Shakespeare.      London: ELBS & Collins, 1951.
- Couch, A.Q. and Wilson, J. Dover. (ed).                      Measure for Measure.      Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1950.
- Couch, A.Q. and Wilson, J. Dover (ed).                      All's Well that Ends Well.      Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1955.
- Hunter, G.K. (ed).                      All's Well that Ends Well.      London: Mathew and Co., 1959.
- Lever, J.W. (ed).                      Measure for Measure      London: Mathew & Co., 1959.
- Walker, Alice (ed).                      Titolus and Cressida      Cambridge.      Cambridge University Press, 1957.

SECONDARY SOURCES:

Authorised Version of the Bible.

- Bradley, A.C.                      Shakespearean Tragedy  
London: Macmillan and  
Co., 1905.
- Engleton, Terence.                Shakespeare and Society.  
London: Chatto and  
Windus, 1967.
- House, F.M.                        Spiritual Values in  
Shakespeare. New York:  
Abingdon Press, 1955.
- Knight, G. Wilson.                The Wheel of Fire.  
Meridian Books, Inc, 1957.
- Leech, Clifford(ed).              Twentieth Century Views  
on All's Well that Ends  
Well. New Jersey:  
Prentice Hall, Inc, 1969.
- Lawrence, W.W.                    Shakespeare's Problem  
Comedies. New York:  
Frederick Ungar  
Publishing, 1960.
- Palmer, D.J. (ed).                Casebook on Measure for  
Measure. Glasgow:  
Macmillan.

- Reese, M.M. The Tudors and Stuarts.  
London: Edward Arnold &  
Co, 1940.
- Rossiter, A.P. Angel with Horns. London:  
Longmans, 1961.
- Schanzer, Ernest. The Problem Plays of  
Shakespeare. London:  
Routledge and Kegan Paul,  
1963.
- Tillyard, E.M.W. Shakespeare's Problem  
Plays. London: Chatto &  
Windus, 1957.
- Traversi, Derek. An Approach to Shakes-  
peare. Vol. 2. London:  
Hollis and Carter, 1969.
- GENERAL BACKGROUND
- Brown, Ivor. Shakespeare. Oxford  
University Press, 1949.
- Ritche, S.L. "Troilus and Cressida"  
Shakespeare: Modern  
Essays in Criticism(ed).  
Dean, F. Leonard. New York:  
Oxford University Press,  
1961.

- Cazamian and Legouis      A History of English Literature.      London: J.M.Dent & Sons Ltd., Aldine Press, 1965.
- Chambers, F.K.      A Short life of Shakespeare with the Sources,      Oxford, 1933.
- Chaudhari, Sukanta      The Infirm Glory: Shakespeare and the Renaissance Image of Man      Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981.
- Ford, Boris.      The Age of Shakespeare, (Pelican Guide to English Literature, Vol.2),      Great Britain: Penguin books, 1982.
- Fornor, Una- Ellis.      Shakespeare the Dramatist (ed). Kenneth Muir,      London: Methuen & Co. 1961.
- Fudowick, F.F.C.      Understanding Shakespeare.      London: Cambridge University Press, 1962.

- Hair, Kenneth. "Troilus and Cressida",  
(Shakespeare Survey, No.VIII)  
1955.
- Palmer, D.J. Casebook on The Tempest  
Glasgow: Macmillan, 1968.
- Priestley, J.B. Literature and Western Man.  
New York: Harper Bros. 1960.
- Ribner, Irving. William Shakespeare. New York:  
Wiley Eastern Ltd. 1978.
- Schanzer, Earnest. "The Marriage Contracts in  
Measure for Measure"  
(Shakespeare Survey, No.XIII)  
1960.
- Speaight, Robert Shakespeare the Man and His  
Achievements, New York: Stein  
and Day, 1982.
- Summers, H.J. Dreams of Love and Power: On  
Shakespeare's Plays. Oxford:  
Clarendon Press, 1984.
- Tillyard, E.M.W. The Elizabethan World Picture.  
1943.
- Wilson, J. Dover. Life in Shakespeare's England.  
1968.



Shakespeare, Comedies, Histories  
and Tragedies. Facsimile Folio  
edition, Oxford.

JOURNALS:

- |                     |   |
|---------------------|---|
| Knight, L.C.        | "The Ambiguity of Measure for Measure", <i>Scrutiny</i> X, (1942)                                   |
| Leech, Clifford.    | "The Meaning of Measure for Measure", ( <i>Shakespeare Survey</i> , III, ed. Kenneth Muir) 1950.    |
| Muir, Kenneth.      | "Troilus and Cressida", ( <i>Shakespeare Survey</i> , No. VIII) 1955.                               |
| Stevenson, L.David. | "Design and Structure in Measure for Measure", ( <i>English Literary History</i> , XXIII, IV) 1956. |
| Schanzer, Earnest.  | "The Marriage Contracts in Measure for Measure", ( <i>Shakespeare Survey</i> , No. XIII) 1960.      |

CORRIGENDUM

Please read dash ( — ) instead of hyphen (-) on :

page no.	10	1	17
page no.	12	1	20
page no.	45	1	9
page no.	48	1	5
page no.	43	1	9
page no.	49	1	8
page no.	52	1	4
page no.	53	1	12
page no.	57	1	3
page no.	60	1	20
page no.	62	1	10
page no.	63	1	15